



Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2023 AP[®] United States Government and Politics Set 1

Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	329,132		
• Number of Readers	1,174		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	42,081	12.79
	4	37,352	11.35
	3	82,586	25.09
	2	78,839	23.95
	1	88,274	26.82
• Global Mean	2.59		

The following comments on the 2023 free-response questions for AP[®] United States Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Stella Rouse, 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: Concept Application

Topic: Kennedy Moon Speech

Max Score: 3

Mean Score: 1.03

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The Concept Application question expected students to apply course concepts in response to a provided real-world scenario. The focus of the scenario was a speech given by President John F. Kennedy intended to gain support for the mission to the moon as a matter of high priority for the United States. This scenario addresses several topics in the course and exam description from Unit 2 related to the Big Ideas of Constitutionalism (CON) and Competing Policy Making Interests (PMI). Ultimately, this question asked students to demonstrate an understanding of the various stages of the policymaking process and the different participants in that process or (those stages).

In the first part, students were expected to understand the informal power of the president to use persuasion, or the “bully pulpit,” to set an agenda. The focus of part A of the question was for students to use the information in the scenario to demonstrate that President Kennedy was setting an agenda by appealing to the public for support of the mission.

In part B the students were expected to connect the public pressure generated by Kennedy’s use of the bully pulpit to oversight actions by Congress. Students were expected in the context of the scenario to demonstrate an understanding that congressional oversight could be increased or decreased context of the scenario and to demonstrate that the oversight was over NASA and not the president.

In part C students were expected to demonstrate a clear understanding of how NASA could implement the agenda set by the president using its discretionary and/or rulemaking authority to carry out the proposed agenda to send a manned mission to the moon.

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?

It was challenging for some students to apply knowledge of course concepts in the context of the provided scenario.

In part A most students were able to accurately describe either the power of persuasion and its intended result, or the bully pulpit as they were used in this scenario. Some students struggled with identifying the correct informal power of the president because they identified the formal power exercised by Eisenhower instead of the informal power exercised by Kennedy. For students who found this section challenging, a more careful reading and a better understanding of the difference between formal powers (e.g., signing an act into law) and informal powers (e.g., giving a persuasive speech) would reduce this stumbling block.

In part B students were directed to demonstrate the impact of the scenario on the oversight function of Congress. Most students were able to demonstrate an understanding of how the pressure created by the public would lead to action by Congress directed toward the agenda of a manned mission to the moon. However, many students struggled to connect that to the oversight function of Congress and/or they connected it to oversight of the president rather than oversight of NASA. Common responses included responding to public pressure in order to be re-elected or passing legislation, neither of which are oversight.

Students who successfully responded to this part of the question demonstrated an understanding that the pressure generated by President Kennedy’s address led to either an increase or decrease in oversight of the space program.

In part C students needed to demonstrate an understanding of how NASA, as a part of the bureaucracy, has either discretionary or rulemaking authority (or both) which allows them to make choices about how to best implement the mission to the moon. Responses that earned credit included descriptions of discretionary or rulemaking authority along with an example of how it would be reflected in the scenario. For example, NASA can slow down or speed up the timeline for the moon mission, or it could write regulations for safety and success, so its expertise might determine that the moon mission was not feasible. However, student responses that indicated obstruction of the agenda to reach the moon with a manned mission did not earn credit. In the context of the scenario, NASA would not obstruct the president’s agenda. Obstruction is illegal and would not support implementation. Many students responded in this section about the use of the iron triangle to support President Kennedy’s agenda. These responses were generally focused on the wrong part of the policymaking cycle (e.g., provide information to the president to support his speech, testify to Congress about how important the mission is to help secure funding) or did not show an understanding of which part of the iron triangle performs what actions.

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"> In part A some students struggled with an understanding of formal vs. informal powers and the intended purpose of the use of the informal power in the context of the scenario (to gain support from the public). Some students struggled with understanding which part of the policymaking cycle the prompt was asking them to describe (agenda setting), and this prevented them from responding to the prompt successfully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The president utilized a bully pulpit to address key issues and explain its importance to the people. This helped to garner support for the project.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In part B some students struggled with explaining the impact of the president’s speech as it related to Congressional oversight. They focused instead on the pressure aspect from the public as it related to re-election or to policymaking rather than oversight. Some students struggled with identifying the target of the oversight actions, focusing on oversight of the president instead of oversight of NASA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “John F. Kennedy’s use of the bully pulpit enables him (the president) to direct pressure from the public ... in order to achieve policy goals ... Consequently, congressional oversight could have expanded funding for NASA and requested congressional hearings at a sufficient rate so Congress is constantly updated about the progress that has been made on the Moon project, and is able to provide any resources NASA still requires.”

- In part C some students demonstrated an understanding of the overall role of the bureaucracy, but their description and explanation related to a part of the policymaking process other than implementation; for example, providing expert information to the president to help him prepare his agenda, or testifying before Congress to convince them to approve funding, or making connections to iron triangles which is part of policy formulation. Some students wrote about obstruction of the president’s agenda through willful actions like refusing to spend money allocated for the project, which is illegal.

- “As an independent agency in the bureaucracy, the implementation of Kennedy’s agenda was up to NASA’s discretion. They could have decided that reaching the moon was the top priority & worked towards achieving it, or that there were other necessary prerequisite tests were required first, speeding up or delaying the actual launch time by several years.”

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?

Many students seem to need more reinforcement on the various stages of the policymaking process (agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation, oversight), who is active in each stage, and how one stage flows from the other. Teachers should create lessons that allow students to connect the policymaking cycle with real-world examples. For instance, utilize current events and have students identify the actions being taken in the current event scenario, who is taking the actions, and where the actions fall in the policymaking process. One way to do this might be to create a policymaking chart or other laminated graphic that students can regularly write on and add to as a visual reminder of how the process works.

Expose students to scenarios on a regular basis and ask them to relate the information to various parts of the curriculum that teachers have already covered. For example, teachers can provide students with an excerpt from an academic article, blog, or podcast and ask them to describe the parts of the policymaking process that are presented, identifying who is taking action, what action they are taking, how other groups not mentioned might respond to the situation (e.g., interest groups, the media, the people), and what the consequences or impact of this decision/event might be. Articles from The National Constitution Center and civics-related podcasts, like Civics 101, might provide good scenarios for use in the classroom for this purpose.

Provide regular opportunities for students to use the task verbs that are found in the free-response portion of the exam (identify, describe, compare, explain how, explain why), through bellringers, in-class activities, homework, or exit tickets, so that students will understand the expectations for the writing portion more clearly, and they will more fully develop their reasoning and writing skills in response to this type of question. These activities can include discussions where students are expected to fully describe or explain a concept in relation to a prompt either provided by teachers or written by the students. Hexagonal thinking activities related to the appropriate vocabulary could also be effective for helping students connect the concepts to one another, with written or verbal explanations of the concepts they are connecting, using the appropriate task verbs (for oral explanation, students can identify what task they are demonstrating).

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

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The Course and Exam Description (CED), which includes the Course Framework (CF), was updated in July 2023. Please download the newest version of this resource for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. For part A, Topic 2.14 Holding the Bureaucracy Accountable includes content about Congressional oversight of the bureaucracy. For part B, Topic 5.3 Political Parties, Topic 5.12 The Media, and Topic 5.13 Changing Media provide information about how the media can influence political participation and communicate individual preferences to policymakers. For part C, Topic 5.1 Voting Rights and Models of Voting Behavior addresses models of voting behavior including retrospective voting. An accurate understanding of these topics is important for responding accurately to this FRQ.
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year, and later items increase in challenge as teachers progress through the course. AP Classroom also includes topic-specific AP Daily Videos that provide content related to this FRQ.
- The Review section under Course Resources has AP Daily Videos for review. While the content of the topics in the Review Sessions may be different than the topics on this exam, these videos provide detailed information on responding to the different types of FRQs found on this exam.
- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the concept application FRQ, Unit 2-Data Analysis and Concept Application.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

Question 2

Task: Quantitative Analysis

Topic: Political Participation and Elections

Max Score: 4

Mean Score: 2.29

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The Quantitative Analysis question called on students to read and interpret data related to the political participation of 18- to 24-year-olds in the 2018 and 2020 elections. First, students were expected to identify the most significant change over time in the data. Next, students were expected to describe the difference in overall participation between midterm and presidential elections using the data in the bar graph. Third, students were asked to draw a conclusion about how linkage institutions might have contributed to the difference in participation as demonstrated in the bar graph. Finally, this question challenged students to explain how the different levels of participation shown in the bar graph could demonstrate political efficacy.

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?

Student performances in analyzing the data in the bar graph were quite strong. In part A most student responses correctly identified “Donated money to a campaign” as the form of political participation that saw the largest change between the 2018 and 2020 elections.

In part B correct responses were also significantly high. Part B required students to describe the difference in overall participation between the midterm and presidential elections. Typically, responses either answered that there was more political participation overall during the 2020 presidential election than in the midterm election or that there was less participation in the midterm election compared to the presidential election.

The knowledge required in part C included the actions a linkage institution could take that would affect the difference in participation rates between the midterm (2018) and presidential (2020) elections. Correct responses in part C often gave a linkage institution action from one election (2018), such as the media focused less coverage on the midterm election than the presidential election. Many students successfully connected that to the change in political participation such as more media attention led to more participation. Many incorrect responses simply identified an action a linkage institution could do differently but did not relate it to a change between the elections or any change in participation due to that action. Students were not required to identify a specific linkage institution to earn the point, but students that used a specific linkage institution tended to generate more correct responses than those who discussed linkage institutions in general.

Part D asked students to explain how the different levels of participation might demonstrate the concept of political efficacy. Students were required to discuss what political efficacy was, through a definition or a description, to demonstrate how political efficacy led to a different level of participation. Responses that earned the point accurately made the connection between levels of political efficacy and levels of political participation. Many responses confused efficacy with political knowledge or political participation, or they did not clearly demonstrate an understanding of efficacy.

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

Many demonstrated a lack of understanding of what linkage institutions do. Additionally, responses showed that students often struggled to understand overall trends in the bar graphs and, instead, listed specific data points without an accurate comparison. Responses also demonstrated difficulty in identifying the action of a linkage institution that would impact political participation. Responses also tended to focus on what linkage institutions do, rather than on connecting the action of linkage institutions to changes in political participation.

Many responses were unclear about the definition of political efficacy, with the misconception it is political knowledge or political participation.

Many responses did not understand the task verbs and what is required of each (identify, describe, draw a conclusion, explain).

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Definitions of terms like linkage institutions or efficacy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Political efficacy, or the belief your vote matters, is generally higher for presidential elections ... This increased belief would then lead more people to vote and participate.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How linkage institutions can influence voter behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Linkage institutions such as the news and social media may have increased their push for candidates and coverage times during the presidential elections versus midterms” accurately describes an action taken by linkage institutions and connects the action to political participation. “This makes the public inclined to have higher political participation and can account for the sharp increase across all types of political participation.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A better understanding of the task verbs to draw a conclusion or provide more thorough responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Political efficacy is the belief that you can change/influence what happens in government. Typically, people who have a higher political efficacy participate in government more because they believe they can do more to influence government. So theoretically, people who tried to convince others to vote would have a higher political efficacy than those who volunteered for a political campaign.”

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?

Teachers should emphasize and consistently use vocabulary, lectures, formative assessments, and unit summative assessments from the framework in class.

Teachers should have students practice interpreting data from various graphs, data sets, etc. that require students to denote trends, changes, and contrasts.

Teachers should also emphasize specific linkage institutions and ways they attempt to influence behaviors of citizens/voters and elections. (Topics 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, and 5.12).

Students should be able to recall relevant course concepts and apply them to the data provided.

Students should write sample FRQs like this one to practice their responses.

Teachers should work with students on the different task verbs they may encounter on the exam. On questions that ask to “draw a conclusion” or “explain,” students need to fully explain how/why something is happening. Students should practice writing a clear paragraph with how/why/because explanations as part of formative assessments.

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

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The Course and Exam Description (CED), which includes the Course Framework (CF), was updated in July 2023. Please download the newest version of this resource for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. An understanding of the information provided in Topic 5.4 How and Why Political Parties Change and Adapt as well as Topic 5.2 Voter Turnout and Topic 1.2 Types of Democracy is important for responding accurately to this FRQ.
- In AP Classroom teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year, and later items increase in challenge as teachers progress through the course. AP Classroom also includes topic-specific AP Daily Videos that provide content related to this FRQ.
- The Review section under Course Resources has AP Daily Videos for review. While the content of the topics in the Review Sessions may be different than the topics on this exam, these videos provide detailed information on responding to the different types of FRQs found on this exam.
- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the Quantitative Analysis FRQ, Unit 2-Data Analysis and Concept Application.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

Question 3

Task: SCOTUS Comparison

Topic: First Amendment: Freedom of Religion

Max Score: 4

Mean Score: 1.46

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This SCOTUS Comparison question asked the students to read a summary of a nonrequired case (*Cantwell v. Connecticut*) and compare it to a course-required case (*Yoder v. Wisconsin*). Students were asked to identify the First Amendment clause that was common to both cases. Additionally, students needed to explain how the relevant facts in *Cantwell* and *Yoder* led to similar holdings. Lastly, the students were required to explain how the facts of *Cantwell* illustrate the Court’s need to balance government power and the rights of citizens.

These increasingly challenging tasks required a thorough understanding of the holdings of *Yoder* and *Cantwell*, along with accurately comparing key facts between the two cases. Additionally, students were asked to integrate relevant course concepts into the Court case comparison.

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?

Students were generally proficient at identifying the free exercise clause, which was the specific First Amendment clause common to *Yoder* and *Cantwell*. Some students identified the establishment clause as being common to both cases, which demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of the various religious protections contained within the First Amendment. Students struggled with the higher-order task of comparing the facts in the cases that led to similar holdings. Many students simply described the facts of the case related to *Yoder* but failed to explain how the Court’s holdings in the rulings were similar. The same students had difficulty explaining how the common First Amendment clause applied to the similar holdings of the required and nonrequired cases.

Additionally, many students used the word “similar” without explaining how or why the rulings were similar. These examples demonstrate that some students lacked an understanding of the basic details (facts and holdings) of *Yoder*. Students also struggled to specify the balance of government power and the rights of citizens that the Court had to weigh as it applied to *Cantwell*. While they understood that the Court must balance questions of governmental power with individual liberty (as specified in the prompt), they did not go further and link that discussion to *Cantwell*, in which Court had to balance the state’s concern regarding order and safety with the religious expression rights of citizens.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	Responses that Demonstrate Understanding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although many students were able to correctly identify “the free exercise Clause” as the First Amendment clause common to <i>Yoder</i> and <i>Cantwell</i>, some students incorrectly identified “the establishment Clause,” which did not earn a point for part A. Additionally some students described the content of the free exercise clause, which was not the task assigned in the prompt. Such responses did not earn the point in part A. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The first amendment clause present in both <i>Wisconsin v. Yoder</i> and <i>Cantwell v. Connecticut</i> is the free exercise clause.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many students had difficulty describing relevant information (facts or holding) in <i>Yoder</i>. Common mistakes included an intrinsic misunderstanding of the facts in <i>Yoder</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “In <i>Wisconsin v. Yoder</i>, Amish parents wanted their children to not stay in public school passed [<i>sic</i>] eighth grade as it impacted their religious lifestyle.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although some students were able to explain how the facts in <i>Cantwell</i> were similar to those in <i>Yoder</i>, leading to similar holdings by the Court, many students simply recited the facts or the holding of <i>Cantwell</i> alone, without linking that discussion to the holding in <i>Yoder</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>Wisconsin v. Yoder</i> Amish parents wanted to pull their kids from school due to their religious practices. ... <i>Cantwell</i> was going door to door spreading religion, these led to similar rulings because the 1st Amendment protects the practice of religion.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although many students were able to clearly explain how the facts in <i>Cantwell</i> illustrated the Court’s need to balance government power with the free exercise rights of citizens, many responses contained a mere repetition of the <i>Cantwell</i> facts or provided a general discussion of federalism, selective incorporation, or the basic idea of the need for the Court to balance interests without specifying what the government’s interest was in <i>Cantwell</i>, in comparison to the free exercise interests of citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The courts need to balance government power and citizen’s rights because the government must protect people and their property from malicious people, however people also need their right to practice their religion protected.”

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?

Teachers can help students improve their performance in the following ways:

Teachers should instruct the students to read the prompt language carefully and, if asked to identify the specific clause, think carefully about the specific constitutional clause relevant to the prompt. Additionally, teachers should emphasize the various ways that SCOTUS cases may be evaluated on the exam—facts of the case, holding, and reasoning.

Teachers should emphasize the difference between the facts of a case and its holding. They may wish to directly compare cases as practice for this type of question.

Teachers should direct their students to give special attention to the task verbs in the prompt. If a prompt asks to identify a certain element, the responses must do so in order to earn a point. Descriptions of a related concept will not earn the point for that section.

Teachers should instruct students to be thorough in their answers—especially when the task verb is “explain.”

Teachers should emphasize that when discussing the nonrequired case, students should avoid lengthy descriptions of the case that are already found in the prompt. Students should be instructed to spend their time discussing the relevant course concept connected to the case(s) and provide relevant explanations for the two cases.

Teachers should emphasize that when directly comparing the similarities of the required and nonrequired cases, the two cases cannot simply be described, but rather they must intersect throughout the explanation. The task verb in part B is “explain,” which requires a higher threshold response. Side-by-side descriptions of the required and nonrequired cases do not earn the second point in part B.

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

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The Course and Exam Description (CED), which includes the Course Framework (CF), was updated in July 2023. Please download the newest version of this resource for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. For part A, Topic 3.2 in the CED addresses the First Amendment: Freedom of Religion including the Free Exercise Clause. For part B, students need to understand the facts, issue, holding, reasoning, and decision of the required Supreme Court case *Wisconsin v. Yoder*. For part C, Topic 3.2 First Amendment: Freedom of Religion, Topic 3.3 First Amendment: Freedom of Speech, and Topic 3.6 Amendments: Balancing Individual Freedom with Public Order and Safety provide information about balance between government power and rights of citizens. An accurate understanding of these topics is important for responding accurately to this FRQ.
- In AP Classroom teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year,

and later items increase in challenge as teachers progress through the course. AP Classroom also includes topic-specific AP Daily Videos that provide content related to this FRQ.

- The Review section under Course Resources has AP Daily Videos for review. While the content of the topics in the Review Sessions may be different than the topics on this exam, these videos provide detailed information on responding to the different types of FRQs found on this exam.
- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the SCOTUS Comparison FRQ, Unit 3-Supreme Court Case Analysis.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

Question 4

Task: Argument Essay

Topic: Federal and State Educational Policymaking

Max Score: 6

Mean Score: 1.82

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This Argument Essay question expected students to demonstrate an understanding of the concept of federalism and the role of the federal government and state governments in crafting policy to ensure educational opportunities for all students. Responses should have also demonstrated an understanding of foundational documents related to the concepts of policymaking, federalism, and equality (Article I of the United States Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, Tenth Amendment of the United States Constitution), while taking a position on the topic of the prompt.

Students were expected to articulate a defensible claim/thesis and establish a line of reasoning; support the thesis with evidence from a foundational document(s) and/or the course concepts; use reasoning to explain why the evidence provided supports the thesis; and respond to an alternative perspective using refutation, concession, or rebuttal. Students were also expected to write in the form of an argumentative essay, demonstrating each of the skills mentioned above.

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?

Students generally demonstrated an understanding that education falls under states' reserved powers, but also that the federal government can impact educational opportunities in all states through mandates and the vast resources at their disposal. Although many students struggled with successfully making a defensible claim with a line of reasoning, students who were able to do so were also generally able to provide at least one accurate piece of evidence that supported their claim, with many being able to provide a correct piece of evidence from one of the provided foundational documents. Students were least successful in providing multiple pieces of reasoning, particularly the line of reasoning that should have been adjacent to their claim. While many students were able to provide an alternative perspective, students struggled with explaining that alternative perspective.

The different tasks within this question required students to demonstrate several higher-order thinking skills and apply their substantive knowledge about policymaking, while using the argumentation practice from the course. This type of question requires the content knowledge from the course to be integrated with the practices. Most students were successful in demonstrating some substantive knowledge and several practices associated with the argumentative essay. Most students were also successful in providing a correct piece of specific and relevant evidence related to the prompt.

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

- The most common incorrect response for the thesis point included the following: Many students simply restated the prompt without establishing a line of reasoning or providing a thesis that addressed the effectiveness of federal or state policy. Many students did not provide a line of reasoning adjacent to the claim. These responses did not earn the part C reasoning point for supporting their evidence because the line of reasoning had to be used to support the thesis rather

than the evidence. Many students did not clearly state their claim and line of reasoning at the start of the response, which made it difficult to find a thesis in another part of the response. A common error was listing the evidence or documents as the line of reasoning. Some students did not specifically address the prompt’s question about effectiveness (i.e., students failed to use the phrase “states are more effective” and instead used phrases like “states are more important” or “states have more power”). Students also struggled to provide a line of reasoning for their claim that was beyond simply a restatement of the prompt. For example, students said, “The federal government is more effective in ensuring educational opportunities for all students because they ensure equality in education for all students.” This did not earn a thesis point because the line of reasoning could also apply to state governments. The student needed to add phrasing like “nationwide” or “across all states” to show their understanding that the federal government’s effectiveness is tied to its ability to impact all students and not just those in a particular state(s).

- For the evidence portion of the question, the most frequent error included students confusing foundational documents. Students also focused on the citizenship or due process clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment rather than the equal protection clause, which is the clause relevant to the prompt. Many responses made broad or vague claims about the documents rather than providing evidence specific to that document. For example, some students used the Fourteenth Amendment to describe the decision and role of the federal government in *Brown v. Board of Education*. To earn evidence points for both the Fourteenth Amendment and *Brown v. Board of Education*, students would need to clearly describe each piece of evidence correctly and separately.
- Some students provided reasoning for their evidence but did not earn the reasoning point because the point had to be used as the line of reasoning to support the claim they made to complete their thesis. In these instances, because students did not clearly articulate a line of reasoning adjacent to their claim, the readers had to use this reasoning as the completion of the thesis.
- For the alternative perspective portion of the question, common missteps included students that stated an alternative perspective but failed to explain that perspective before explaining why their position was still most accurate. Some responses attempted concession statements, but they lacked sufficient detail, or it was not apparent that they were actual concessions.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A claim was made either without a clear line of reasoning or without a clear line of reasoning adjacent to the claim (i.e., the line of reasoning was found later in the essay, often attached to a piece of evidence). • A clear claim with a value judgment was not made and/or there was not a line of reasoning by the student. Instead, students listed documents and/or concepts as their attempt at a line of reasoning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The states are more effective in ensuring educational opportunities for all students because they maintain control over what goes on in their respective state.” • “The federal government as is more effective in ensuring educational opportunities for all students because the federal government provides much more funds for those students in need than states do.”

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear claim was made, but the line of reasoning did not relate to the policymaking process (i.e., the line of reasoning vaguely referred to all students; did not clearly associate state effectiveness as being closer to the people in their state; did not clearly associate federal effectiveness with <i>more</i> funding or resources or that federal policy applies to <i>all</i> states; and, instead, just restated the prompt in their line of reasoning, etc.) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students incorrectly used foundational documents, including using the title of one document with a description of a different document or making vague, general claims about the documents that were not specific to the ideas in the documents. • Students incorrectly cited the citizenship or due process clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment to support their argument rather than the equal protection clause. • Students confused the description of Article I of the U.S. Constitution with the First Amendment. • Students used an incorrect document to support their claim, for example, using the Tenth Amendment to support an argument that the federal government is more effective in ensuring educational opportunities for all students or using the Fourteenth Amendment to support an argument that the state governments are more effective in ensuring educational opportunities for all students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Tenth Amendment states that any power not explicitly written in the constitution belong to the states.” • “The Fourteenth amendment of the Constitution contains the equal protection clause which ensures all citizens get fair & equal treatment and application of the law.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students described examples of a course concept without having provided a reasoned explanation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “So it’s shown in the judicial branch part of the federal government, can effectively overturn segregation in schools which resulted in equal educational opportunities for African Americans.”

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students stated an alternate perspective without providing a description. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Others may argue that states are more effective in ensuring educational opportunities for all because they’re more involved locally and have their 10th amendment rights to make policies ensuring educational opportunities. But my claim still reigns supreme because Congress (part of the federal government) could easily pass legislation that would mandate a specific equal educational policy and that would take care of every state, not just one alone.”
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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?

Teachers could emphasize the benefit of beginning the response with a clear thesis that goes beyond restating the prompt and taking a clear position that establishes a line of reasoning. For example, “The federal government is more effective in ensuring educational opportunities for all students because ...”. It is most helpful for the reader to be able to see the clear thesis at the very start of the response. The clear thesis is also the “gateway” to earning all other points. Encourage students to begin their response with their thesis statement that takes a clear position on the question (claim) and provides an adjacent line of reasoning.

Teachers could spend time conducting structured, minilessons that break down each section of the argumentative essay: design exercises based around thesis creation, with a heavy emphasis on crafting thesis statements that take a clear position and establish a line of reasoning; create a lesson centered around how to accurately describe the information contained within the foundational documents; utilize practices designed to analyze and explain how the information found in these documents relates to both course concepts and more current events in order to better develop reasoning skills.

Teachers could spend time on the nine foundational documents to ensure that students can recall specific, descriptive information about each document that is relevant to major course concepts. For example, students needed to describe the Fourteenth Amendment and it wasn’t enough to say, “The Fourteenth Amendment contains the equal protection clause.” Students needed to provide some phrasing that indicates their knowledge about the equal protection clause (i.e., “The Fourteenth amendment contains the equal protection clause which provides for equal treatment for all under the law.”)

Each section of the essay should be addressed as a separate skill that students should work toward mastering. After students become comfortable with each section, then teachers can design classroom practices and assessments to integrate the various elements of a successful argumentative essay.

Teachers should consider providing students with a template for writing the argument essay that begins with a thesis statement, continues with two pieces of evidence and reasoning, and concludes with an alternate perspective.

Teachers could spend time in each unit of study tying course concepts to policymaking. The basis of the argumentation free-response question is to test students’ skill of argumentation and the nine foundational documents. But it is also to test students’ ability to use course concepts and apply them to policymaking. For example, a response could state, in reference to a correctly identified Fourteenth Amendment evidence point, “By allowing the federal government to regulate education, the nation is better at ensuring effective policies that will give all students equal opportunity.”

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

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The Course and Exam Description (CED), which includes the Course Framework (CF), was updated in July 2023. Please download the newest version of this resource for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. An understanding of the information provided in Topic 1.5 Ratification of the U.S. Constitution as well as Topic 1.7 Relationship Between the States and National Government is important for responding accurately to this FRQ.
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year, and later items increase in challenge as teachers progress through the course. AP Classroom also includes topic-specific AP Daily Videos that provide content related to this FRQ.
- The Review section under Course Resources has AP Daily Videos for review. While the content of the topics in the Review Sessions may be different than the topics on this exam, these videos provide detailed information on responding to the different types of FRQs found on this exam.
- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the Argument Essay FRQ, Unit 5-Argumentation.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.