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# AP<sup>®</sup> English Language and Composition

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

### **Inside:**

#### **Free-Response Question 2**

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**Rhetorical Analysis****6 points**

Simu Liu is an actor who has starred in television shows and movies, including *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*. His 2022 memoir, *We Were Dreamers: An Immigrant Superhero Origin Story*, describes his experiences as a Chinese immigrant in Canada. Liu’s parents emigrated to Canada from China when Liu was a baby, leaving him with his grandparents. In the following excerpt from Liu’s memoir, the family is getting the four-year-old Liu ready to reunite with his father and travel to Canada himself. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Liu makes to convey his message about the experience of preparing to emigrate from China.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis (0–1 points)	<b>0 points</b> For any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no defensible thesis.</li> <li>The intended thesis only restates the prompt.</li> <li>The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim.</li> <li>There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt.</li> </ul>	<b>1 point</b> Responds to the prompt with a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only restate the prompt.</li> <li>Fail to address the rhetorical choices the writer of the passage makes.</li> <li>Describe or repeat the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense.</li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt <u>and</u> clearly articulate a defensible thesis about the rhetorical choices Liu makes to convey his message about the experience of preparing to emigrate from China.</li> </ul>
	<b>Examples that do not earn this point:</b> <b>Restate the prompt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“When he was a baby, Simu Liu’s parents left him to emigrate from China to Canada.”</li> </ul> <b>Make a claim but do not address the writer’s rhetorical choices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“In his memoir, Simu Liu conveys the difficulties of being uprooted from one country to emigrate to another.”</li> </ul> <b>Repeat provided information from the passage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“When he was preparing for his emigration to Canada, four-year-old Simu Liu had to learn many new things, including a new language.”</li> </ul>	<b>Examples that earn this point:</b> <b>Present a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Simu Liu uses humor, descriptive language, and narration to convey his mixed feelings about emigrating to a different country.”</li> <li>“In his memoir, Liu shifts between the innocence of a four-year-old child and the wisdom of his adult self to describe his experiences meeting his father again and preparing to move to Canada.”</li> <li>“Simu Liu was, like many child immigrants, not given a choice in his own future when his parents decided to emigrate to a different country. Through the specific narrative examples he chooses to discuss in this excerpt, Liu conveys the hesitance, unwillingness, and confusion he felt during his own experience as a child immigrant.”</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity.</li> <li>The thesis may be anywhere within the response.</li> <li>For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn’t do so to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning.</li> </ul>		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
<b>Row B</b> <b>Evidence</b> <b>AND</b> <b>Commentary</b> <b>(0–4 points)</b>	<b>0 points</b> Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	<b>1 point</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides evidence that is mostly general.  <b>AND</b> <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument.	<b>2 points</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides some specific, relevant evidence.  <b>AND</b> <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.	<b>3 points</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b> <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b> Explains how at least one rhetorical choice in the passage contributes to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.	<b>4 points</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b> <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b> Explains how multiple rhetorical choices in the passage contribute to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
	<b>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are incoherent or do not address the prompt.</li> <li>May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tend to focus on summary or description of a passage rather than specific details or techniques.</li> <li>Mention rhetorical choices with little or no explanation.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities.</li> <li>May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument.</li> <li>May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim.</li> <li>Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument.</li> <li>Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims.</li> <li>Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument.</li> <li>Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained.</li> <li>Explain how the writer’s use of rhetorical choices contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row.</li> <li>To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same rhetorical choice if each instance further contributes to the argument, purpose, or message of the passage.</li> </ul>					

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Sophistication (0–1 points)	<b>0 points</b> Does not meet the criteria for one point.	<b>1 point</b> Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attempt to contextualize the text, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”).</li> <li>Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“<i>While some may argue that...</i>” OR “<i>Some people say...</i>”).</li> <li>Examine individual rhetorical choices but do not examine the relationships among different choices throughout the text.</li> <li>Oversimplify complexities in the text.</li> <li>Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance their analysis.</li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explaining the significance or relevance of the writer’s rhetorical choices (given the rhetorical situation).</li> <li>Explaining a purpose or function of the passage’s complexities or tensions.</li> <li>Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.</li> </ol>
	<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference.</li> </ul>	

In the memoir, *We Were Dreamers: An Immigrant Superhero Origin Story*, Simu Liu narrates how he prepared and came to accept his eventual leave to Canada and portrays his relationship with his family in China versus with his father in order to highlight that fear and difficulty that comes with acceptance and change and the hardships in leaving people behind and starting over, ultimately moving the audience to realize that although scary, change is something that happens to everyone and that they must persevere through it, and eventually, embrace it.

Simu Lie narrates the events leading up to his departure from China and how he prepared for his new life in Canada in order to highlight how difficult and scary change can be, as well as the acceptance of it. Take, for example, as Simu Lie's family attempts to convince him that his move to Canada will be great because of all the food he can eat and because he is meeting his parents, Lie is skeptical and believes that he has all his favorite foods right there in Hexinglu and he "already had five amazing people around [him] who loved [him]," (Lie 3). This establishes Lie's point that change is hard to accept and is difficult to prepare for, as well as his point that it is hard to see the other side of change. Furthermore, Lie narrates that although he didn't know exactly what was going on he simply "played along," (Lie 6). This further establishes Lie's point that change is often unexpected and although one can prepare for it, it is still scary and difficult when it comes and the best one can do is to simply play along and attempt to accept it. Lie is able to establish an emotional connection with the audience because many of them can relate to his experiences, as lots of people have had to move places throughout their lives and leave family and friends behind. This is important because Lie reminds the audience of the difficulty and fear during this time, but that they also were able to persevere through it and adapt. This helps further resonate Lie's point with the audience in that they should take these lessons they learned in the past and apply them to any obstacles in the future. All of this would move the audience to realize that even though change is scary and difficult, they can persevere and attempt to accept it, and eventually even embrace it.

Simu Lie portrays the relationship with his family in China versus the one with his father in order to highlight the hardships that come with leaving people behind and starting over. Take, for example, as Lie continues to prepare to leave for Canada, he wonders what his parents will be like and if leaving is really worth "the cost of everyone that [he] knew and loved," (Lie 6). This establishes Lie's point that one of the hardest parts about change can be leaving people behind, as well as the hardships that come with dealing with and accepting this. Furthermore, when Lie first meets his father he imagined that he would run up to him and embrace him like a normal child would do to their father. However, when the time comes, Lie freezes up and looks at his father as if he is "a stranger, an acquaintance at best," (Lie 19). This further establishes Lie's point by displaying how scary change can be when having to start over. Lie has to leave behind his life with all his loved ones to start a new life with someone that he perceives to be almost a stranger who is going to "take [him] away from [his] family, [his] home, and everything that [he had] ever known," (Lie 20). All of this would move the audience to realize that starting over and leaving people behind is one of the hardest parts about change, but they must persevere and adapt, and eventually, the change could be for the better.

Lie narrates the events leading up to his departure to Canada and his preparation for it and portrays the difference in the relationship that he has with his family in China versus his father in order to illustrate how hard change can be due to leaving people behind and starting over, ultimately moving the audience to persevere through change, and eventually even embrace it with the knowledge that it could be for the better.

Simu Liu wrote a memoir about his bittersweet experience as a Chinese immigrant. Liu effectively delivers his experiences as an immigrant child while also allowing the audience to empathize with his story through his smooth and meticulous implementation of rhetorical devices such as diction, imagery, and repetition.

One rhetorical device that can be easily identified in the passage is diction. One notable use of diction that stood out to me was in paragraph 6, where he modified the word cult, and added a y to the end of it, to make it "cult-y." First of all, this change allows for the word to be more easily understood by an audience who did not have the experience. He described the situation in a more relatable way that the audience would be able to easily decipher. The already well-known word of cult, with a y attached to the end, indicating that is an adjective meant to describe the situation, made it easy to understand the feeling of the atmosphere that he was in. Another example of diction is "this man" or just "man," repeated throughout the latter part of the passage. This is important to pay attention to as it illuminates the relationship Liu had with his father, or rather, the bitter attitude Liu had towards his father as he felt he was taking away from his life and current family. Calling his father "man" indicates that Liu did not know his father as someone who, from my perspective, you throw ball with or receive giant hugs from. Instead, this man was foreign to him, which he elaborated on in paragraph 14. Lastly, the use of the word man could have an ironic interpretation, as it is often a term used to describe a somewhat untouchable person of great importance. In paragraph 11, consisting of one sentence, the satirical expression of his father as being someone who can accomplish great and difficult tasks such as "bringing [him] to the promised land of Canada" reveals Liu's true attitude towards his father, which is a lack of respect by undermining him.

Another rhetorical device used that makes the writing style of the author stronger is imagery. In paragraph 8 of the excerpt from Liu's memoir, he described a big welcome sign. He used all caps for the "welcome sign" to illustrate in the minds of the audience what the sign looked like. He follows this method of capitalization by describing the sign as having giant letter and hung on their door to further reveal what the sign looked like, which is a great use of imagery. Additionally, imagery is utilized in the following paragraph. He describes the meal that was partaken in celebration of his family's immigration to Canada. Extensive detail is used in this paragraph to describe what the feast looked like and the specifics of the contents of the meal through adjectives such as white to describe the mushrooms, sliced, to indicate the type of pork, and so on. Again the imagery used here to describe the feast gives the audience an accurate representation of what the feast may have been like or looked like, given that the audience reading this portion was not there to experience the feast.

Lastly, repetition is a very important and notable rhetorical device used in this snippet of Liu's memoir. As discussed above, Liu identified and described his father simply as "this man." This phrase and word choice is repeated throughout paragraphs 11 through 14, and the use of repetition in this instance has great significance. Again, as previously mentioned, the use of the word choice "man" shows how there was a lack of an emotional connection between the father and the son. Repetition further intensifies this effect. Repeating this man, rather than identifying his father as a man once, emphasizes the fact that Liu will *never* see his "real" father as more than just a man. So, to conclude, Liu creates a very well written analysis of his experience through his use of diction, imagery, and repetition. These rhetorical devices in turn, make the situation easier for the audience to understand and identify with.

As I read this memoir from Simu Liu I catch a lot from this little part we get to read. Very interesting and it's very descriptive with the native language he shows us and the very fond memories he has of each part and the sorta silliness you get from it. It's a lot that makes the book more enjoyable to read.

Now one of the first strategies I got from this was his language. Meaning his Chinese language. He references some of these words all over the text but of my favorite were "yéye, nāinai, gūgu, gūfū." Whenever he speaks about his family members he always uses his Chinese language. Or more importantly the family he most loved and grew up with. Because as we see he refers to his dad as "dad" not "Bàba." This type of strategy actually makes this passage very interesting. Makes it funner more catching. It's a new way to learn words and the way he uses it, you can tell who we loved a little bit more.

Another strategy I got was description. The way he describes every thing he remembers with such precise it's actually fascinating. You can see it when he talks about the clothes he wore the day he met his dad and the first time he actually saw his dad. "I wore my nicest clothes on the day, an outfit of absolute fire consisting of a collared rugby shirt with blue and purple strips, a pair of brown overalls with yellow polka dots and a belt that looked like a burlap sack." "When we hear a little knock on the door. I perk up anxiously as my yéye answers, opening the door to reveal a scrawny, square-faced man with bowl-cut hair wearing a big cozy sweater along with the bleary gaze of exhaustion that comes after an eighteen-hour train ride from Beijing." Now that's what I'm talking about. The way he describes what he's wearing with such precise and exactly knowing. And the way he goes from the moment that led up to meeting his dad to exactly knowing what he looked like after so many years.

One last one I saw which was minor was a metaphor. Simple as it gets. "Everyone around me bursts out laughing. The ice is broken and I laugh alone even though I don't get the joke." "The ice is broken" is a perfect way to show that well it is what is and we're all comfortable with each other.

Now from all that I seen these are most of from what I got but to be honest this memoir is really interesting he brought a little bit of his culture here and showed in the most interesting way possible. To the way he explains everything is such detail and the little funny parts.



## Question 2

**Note:** Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

### Overview

The students responding to this question were instructed to read a portion of Simu Liu’s memoir, *We Were Dreamers: An Immigrant Superhero Origin Story*, which explores Liu’s personal experiences as a Chinese immigrant in Canada, particularly focusing on his upbringing. Liu’s parents moved to Canada from China when he was a baby, and he was brought up by his grandparents. The students were asked to develop a thesis that analyzes the author’s use of rhetorical choices, providing relevant evidence to support their assertions. Additionally, they were assigned to explain how the evidence they selected reinforces their line of reasoning, demonstrating an understanding of the rhetorical situation, and utilizing proper grammar and punctuation to express their viewpoints effectively.

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

### Sample: 2A

**Score: 1-4-0**

#### Thesis (0–1 points): 1

Paragraph 1 consists of one sentence that provides a defensible thesis: “In the memoir, *We Were Dreamers: An Immigrant Superhero Origin Story*, Simu Liu narrates how he prepared and came to accept his eventual leave to Canada and portrays his relationship with his family in China versus with his father in order to highlight that fear and difficulty that comes with acceptance and change and the hardships in leaving people behind and starting over, ultimately moving the audience to realize that although scary, change is something that happens to everyone and that they must persevere through it, and eventually, embrace it.” While not required, the response brings up both a specific purpose as well as a call to action.

#### Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The line of reasoning is developed as the response moves from describing Liu’s Chinese family (“the events leading up to his departure from China” in paragraph 2) to Liu meeting his father (“the relationship with his family in China versus the one with his father” in paragraph 3) and then to the implications for Liu’s audience about accepting and embracing change. All parts work together in service of the argument.

The response focuses on the importance of the details in the evidence it provides, including multiple direct quotations from the passage in paragraphs 2 and 3. These examples are followed up with commentary that explains how Liu’s use of rhetorical choices contributes to the message of the “difficulty that comes with acceptance and change and the hardships in leaving people behind and starting over” (paragraph 1). For example, the response highlights that Liu “‘already had five amazing people around [him] who loved [him]’ (Lie 3)” and then explains that “This establishes Lie’s point that change is hard to accept and is difficult to prepare for, as well as his point that it is hard to see the

**Question 2 (continued)**

other side of change.” The connection to the argument is clear as it explains how the rhetorical choices contribute to the interpretation of the passage.

**Sophistication (0–1 points): 0**

The style of the response is not consistently vivid and persuasive. Also, the response does not explore the given rhetorical situation. While it mentions the audience in several places (such as “This is important because Lie reminds the audience of the difficulty and fear during this time” in paragraph 1), it does not demonstrate a complex understanding of Liu’s precise rhetorical situation. The response brings up “the hardest parts about change” (paragraph 3), but it does not develop this idea. Finally, the commentary does not explain the function of either complexities or tensions within specific areas of the text.

**Sample: 2B****Score: 1-3-0****Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

The brief first paragraph presents the thesis: “Liu effectively delivers his experience as an immigrant child while also allowing the audience to empathize with his story through his smooth and meticulous implementation of rhetorical devices such as diction, imagery, and repetition.” This sentence provides a defensible claim about choices Liu makes and connects them to his purpose of conveying his experience and of generating empathy.

**Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3**

The response provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. It identifies details such as word choices (e.g., “cult-y” and “man” in paragraph 2 and “welcome sign” in paragraph 3) to relate to the audience and reveal his attitude toward his father. Paragraph 4 returns to word choices such as “this man” to reiterate the claim about how the language Liu uses reveals his alienation from his father. The response also provides commentary explaining what some of the evidence contributes. For instance, the discussion of “man” in paragraph 2 is well-integrated, explaining how “it illuminates the relationship Liu had with his father, or rather, the bitter attitude Liu had towards his father as he felt he was taking away from his life and current family. Calling his father ‘man’ indicates that Liu did not know his father as someone who, from my perspective, you throw ball with or recieve giant hugs from. Instead, this man was foreign to him, which he elaborated on in paragraph 14.” After that specific commentary, the response then moves to a discussion of the “ironic interpretation,” which further develops a line of reasoning back to the thesis.

Other evidence, however, is less integrated. For example, the discussion of “cult-y” states, “First of all, this change allows for the word to be more easily understood by an audience who did not have the experience. He described the situation in a more relatable way that the audience would be able to easily decipher. The already well-known word of cult, with a y attached to the end, indicating that is an adjective meant to describe the situation, made it easy to understand.” In this case, the response merely repeats the idea of understanding without making a clear connection to the claim and thus the line of reasoning. This inconsistency in commentary results in only some of the evidence supporting the line of reasoning.

## Question 2 (continued)

### **Sophistication (0–1 points): 0**

The response is not vivid and persuasive, though ideas are expressed clearly. For example, the first sentence in paragraph 3 (“Another rhetorical device used that makes the writing style of the author stronger is imagery”) communicates an explicit focus for the paragraph, but neither the wording nor the syntax demonstrates sophistication. The mention of the “bitter attitude” (paragraph 2) and the assertion that Liu will “*never* see” his father as more than a man (paragraph 4) both touch upon a potential tension, but the idea would need more elaboration and examination of the relationship among different choices.

### **Sample: 2C**

**Score: 1-1-0**

### **Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

The response has a defensible thesis in the first paragraph: “Very interesting and its very descriptive with the native language he shows us and the very fond memories he was of each part and the sorta silliness you get from it. It a lot that makes the book more enjoyabble to read.” The response earned the thesis point with its clear identification of rhetorical choices: descriptive language and the inclusion of memories.

### **Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1**

The response provides quoted evidence in each paragraph that is used primarily to summarize the passage. Paragraph 3, for instance, quotes evidence from the text to illustrate Liu’s description of “every thing he remebers with such precise its actually facinating.” It does not explain how the evidence here supports an argument. Paragraphs 3 and 4 include many quotes that lack any analysis or commentary to explain them and connect them to the claim. For example, the discussion of the metaphor in paragraph 4 is simply the definition of the breaking the ice metaphor.

### **Sophistication (0–1 points): 0**

The response does not delve into the rhetorical situation or the relevance of Liu’s rhetorical choices. The response also lacks any discussion of the passage’s complexities and tensions and how they function, instead making simplistic statements about how the passage is “really interesting” (paragraph 5).