

2024



AP[®] English Language and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

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Free-Response Question 3

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Argument Essay

6 points

In a 2019 interview, award-winning poet and memoirist Jimmy Santiago Baca asserted: “In America we value possessions. We would much rather talk about a new car than talk about a story that happened between grandfather and me. We’d much rather get on the computer and play video games and enact some cataclysmic¹ epic² than to talk about the epics in our own lives.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Baca’s claim about the value of possessions is valid.

¹ destructive on a large scale

² a narrative or story of grand proportions

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
- Provide evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

| Reporting Category | Scoring Criteria | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Row A Thesis (0–1 points)</p> | <p>0 points</p> <p>For any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no defensible thesis. • The intended thesis only restates the prompt. • The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. • There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. | <p>1 point</p> <p>Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.</p> |
| Decision Rules and Scoring Notes | | |
| <p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only restate the prompt. • Do not take a position, or the position is vague or must be inferred. • State an obvious fact rather than making a claim that requires a defense. | | <p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to the prompt by taking a position on the extent to which Baca’s claim about the value of possessions is valid, rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt. Clearly take a position rather than just stating that there are pros/cons. |
| <p>Examples that do not earn this point:</p> <p>Do not take a position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Baca states that some people prefer playing video games to having conversations.”</i> <p>Address the topic of the prompt but are not defensible—it is an obvious fact stated as a claim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Talking about possessions can occupy a lot of time.”</i> | | <p>Examples that earn this point:</p> <p>Present a defensible position that responds to the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Focusing on possessions often keeps people from giving personal relationships enough attention.”</i> • <i>“Baca notes that Americans place too much value on possessions. For many people, this materialistic approach becomes a way of avoiding genuine relationships and not fully participating in their own lives.”</i> • <i>“Many people end up valuing their possessions more highly than they value their experiences and the other people in their lives, which results in their failing to appreciate some of the most important aspects of life.”</i> |
| <p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. • The thesis may be anywhere within the response. • 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. • 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. | | |

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

| Reporting Category | Scoring Criteria | |
|---|--|---|
| Row C Sophistication (0–1 points) | 0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point. | 1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation. |
| | Decision Rules and Scoring Notes | |
| | Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to contextualize their argument, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”). • Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“<i>While some may argue that...</i>” OR “<i>Some people say...</i>”). • Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the argument. | 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: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities or tensions. 2. Articulating the implications or limitations of an argument (either the student’s argument or an argument related to the prompt) by situating it within a broader context. 3. Making effective rhetorical choices that consistently strengthen the force and impact of the student’s argument. 4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive. |
| Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. | | |

Sample 3A (1 of 1)

Materialism has been defined in America for a decent amount of time. Madonna herself noted how we are "living in a material world" and that she desires to be that "material girl". Jimmy Santiago Baca asserts that we value possessions over the stories of our own lives. This is not always the case, however, as many films still continue to share the stories of many -- such as *The Pursuit of Happiness* that shares the story of a father attempting to get a stable income to support his son after he and his wife's divorce. It is an inspirational tale that was rather moving, yet it is still apparent how much materialism is valued. Although the stories that make us who we are are still presently shared, American society does value material possessions more, especially in the new age.

First off, American society values materialistic possessions very presently in the age of online media. Social Media influencers of TikTok and Instagram promote the usage of clothing and makeup products that reach a wide variety of audiences, including younger children. The craze of "10-year-old Sephora Girls" who are supposedly being very rude to Sephora employees and using their parents credit cards to buy anti-aging and other skincare products due to the influence of makeup artists online. Social media influencing individuals to buy useless products shows how materialism is affecting American society in large numbers. It promotes products as being the key to a better life rather than experience or community that actually prove to make human life more enjoyable. Social media reaches a wide audience and can influence larger numbers into agreement as to why what is being promoted is the best and should be owned by you. Advertising was built on the foundations of the War Propoganda buisness in the 1940s and has grown from the convincing tactics used many years ago to feed into it's gains in captial. Using tactics of persuasion that are still heavily used such as peer-pressure, which is a fuel for social media influencing. The idea that "everyone has that so you should too" only grows with the use of online outlets to promote those ideas. Thus the use of social media influencers has a large effect on the promotion of materialistic value over the stories we share.

Secondly, American's value possessions more than the stories we share as a result of dissatisfaction. Some may feel that their life is not as good as others due to the material possessions others own. The song "Everybody's Got Nice Stuff But Me" by The Dead Milkmen is a sarcastic toy on that idea as the singer describes many luxeries that other's own that the singer also wishes to own so he can feel the satisfaction that other's *must* be feeling when they can afford such things. It's a common phrase that money can't buy happiness, but as consumerism grows in the new age of the American economy, the value of possessions seems to outway that of other factors that contribute to a person's value, like community and positivity. The act of consuming a good may bring a temporary moment of increased dopamine -- the chemical in one's brain that enduces excitement -- but a moment can not last forever and can only induce so much happieness over a shortened period of time. Another representation of how materialism flows from dissatisfaction is the creator of the Ace Ventura movies as well as many other Jim Carrey films. After the success of his many comedy films, he indulged in many homes, boats, and other luxeries that he could never have dreamed of affording when he was much younger. Yet he was still never satisfied, no matter how many things he owned. He proceeeded to make a documentary exploring that dissatisfaction, but it never brought about as much change as he had hoped for. Even in the moments of happiness brought about my new products and items, it still doesn't last as long as other positive influences could. Nevertheless, materialistic possessions are still valued as a key to solving dissatisfaction with life, regardless of how it actually works.

Overall, American society does value materialistic possesions over the stories we could share of ourselves but I am highly critical of that aspect of society. Happiness is much greater and lasting in sharing community and experience over the aspect of owning the latest craze or fad.

Sample 3B (1 of 1)

What value should we place on possessions? Regardless of much emphasis we *should* put on them, it's evident that as Americans we put too much. In the words of Jimmy Santiago Baca, "In America we value possessions," which feels truer today than ever.

The trends in America are one cultural aspect that support Baca's point. While societies throughout the history of the world have had trends, they are faster and bigger than before in America. Walk into any high school or middle school classroom in the country and you will see at least a couple girls with Stanley cups. This trend is relatively new (replacing Hydroflasks from a few years back), but it's guaranteed to die out a couple years from now and be replaced by something else. Is it bad to buy a trendy cup? Not at all, but it shows what we value as a society. We buy massive amounts of products that we don't need, showing that we place more value, and status, on possessions than we should.

What would the mental health of a country that puts too much stock in possessions look like? It would have soaring anxiety and depression rates, which is just what we're seeing in America today. When you focus your life on something shallow and surface-level (such as the things that you own), you lack a sense of purpose and meaning in your life. Stuff can't ever truly fulfill you; in fact, it just ends up distracting you from the things that can. By continually focusing on surface-level things, it's harder to build deep, meaningful connections with other people. Since we've fallen out of the habit of doing this as a society, people are lacking the intimacy and connection that we all crave as human beings. We think that having the right car or the right house will get us the approval that we desire, but they will only ever satisfy us on a temporal level.

America is indisputably one of the wealthiest nations in the world. Other countries prefer our money to theirs for its stability, and we have one of the strongest economies in the world. Despite this, there are still hundreds of thousands of starving people in our country. Families across the nation struggle to put food on the table. If this doesn't prove that we value possessions too much, what would? We value possessions to the point that we've forgotten about generosity. Sure, we might buy Girl Scout cookies, or give to the annual school fundraiser; but large scale giving isn't a part of many people's lives. This demonstrates just how attached we are to our stuff. This isn't to say that no one in America is generous; there are many good people out there who give of their time and money to help others, just as there are those who focus on deeper things than possessions in contrast to the previous paragraph. Still, the general trend isn't one of selfless giving.

In conclusion, Baca's claim that "In America we value possessions" is undeniably accurate. It can be seen in the trends that pop up, in the growing lack of meaning in people's lives, and in the startling number of poor for such a rich country. However, these aren't signs to give up on our nation. Instead, they are signs to rally together, to inspire each other, and to one by one shift the value away from our possessions and to one another.

Sample 3C (1 of 1)

In modern America we have come to value possessions highly compared to experiences. This is both reflected and supported on social media, in daily conversations we have with our peers, and is reinforced by society's standards providing us with an easily accessible amount of dopamine.

On social media, everyone would much rather post their cool new sports car compared to the candid picture of them and their friends wide mouth laughing. They do this because social media in America has been trending to show everyone expensive cars, houses, and rare material things that few possess. The dopamine that is received from likes on your pictures and the amount of views has become easy to receive because it is literally at the tip of your finger. We value material things (like cars, houses, and pictures) subconsciously because they provide us with an easy access to dopamine.

Society has also helped continue to push this narrative that material things can provide us with easier access to dopamine based off the daily conversations we have with peers. Society has been on a trend of giving people validation when they "achieve" something as unattainable in modern day America, due to an economic crisis, such as a house, car, or even the latest iPhone. Your peers validate you and give you praise when you obtain these such material items that have become highly priced feeding you with the want to achieve more of these material objects. It also makes you want to praise others who obtain these material objects too.

These items have become the foundation of our lives, shifting the driving force of America. The "American Dream" that was once based on new beginnings and so called equal opportunity has quickly become the "American Dream" of having it all. Madonna said it best, "I'm a material girl and it's a material world."

Material objects have given us easy access to dopamine. In America this dopamine can come from online posts on social media and our daily conversations with peers who validate our material objects making it easy for us to forget about "a story that happened between grandfather and me" (Jimmy Santiago Baca). Due to all of these reasons it is easily said that Americans value possessions more than they do experiences because of the easy access to dopamine, generating a positive response in their bodies.

Question 3

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

Overview

Students responding to this question were expected to read a Jimmy Santiago Baca quote on possessions and write a response that argued their position on the extent to which Baca’s claim about the value of possessions 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 arguments, and make stylistic choices that advance the argument.

Sample: 3A
Score: 1-3-1

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response earns one point for offering a defensible thesis in the last sentence of paragraph 1: “Although the stories that make us who we are are still presently shared, American society does value material possessions more, especially in the new age.” That America values material possessions more is a defensible position which addresses the extent to which Baca’s claim is valid.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response earned a score of 3 for Row B by providing specific evidence to support all claims and by providing commentary that explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning. Paragraph 2 offers specific evidence with a reference to “10-year-old Sephora Girls” who use “their parents credit cards to buy anti-aging and other skincare products.” The commentary explains the messaging of influencer-promoted products “as being the key to a better life rather than experience or community that actually prove to make human life more enjoyable.” While the portion of the commentary dedicated to the history of propaganda is specific and clearly explains how consumers are persuaded, it does not clearly explain how the influence of social media prioritizes possessions “over” human relationships. Despite the paragraph concluding with the observation that “social media influencers has a large effect on the promotion of materialistic value over the stories we share,” the commentary fails to integrate this evidence and fully support the thesis. It focuses primarily on the art of persuasion and not necessarily on the effects of prioritizing possessions over the “stories of our own lives”; therefore, the commentary does not extend the line of reasoning.

In the third paragraph, the response offers the claim that Americans “value possessions more than the stories we share as a result of dissatisfaction.” Specific references to the band The Dead Milkmen and a paraphrase of their lyrics about self-worth and possessing luxuries—“so he can feel the satisfaction that other’s *must* be feeling when they can afford such things”—serve as specific evidence of the claim. The commentary that follows offers an explanation more focused on the central claim by concluding that “the value of possessions seems to outway that of other factors that contribute to a person’s value, like community and positivity.” However, the additional evidence about the trajectory

Question 3 (continued)

of actor Jim Carrey’s career includes specific details about his dissatisfaction with collecting possessions rather than finding value in “other positive influences,” leaving less clear the connection between the evidence and the importance of “stories we share.”

Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

While the response offers commentary that creates an inconsistent or less uniform line of reasoning, it offers a nuanced understanding of the complexities and tensions related to how possessions influence what we value. Paragraph 2, for instance, offers the idea that social media-driven materialism “promotes products as being the key to a better life rather than experience or community that actually prove to make human life more enjoyable.” Exploring this implication helps situate the argument within a broader context of American consumerism. In addition, paragraph 3 includes the idea that “the value of possessions seems to outway that of other factors that contribute to a person’s value, like community and positivity.”

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

The response earned one point for the defensible thesis in the final sentence of the first paragraph, acknowledging Baca’s claim that Americans overvalue possessions, “which feels truer today than ever.” This establishes a defensible position by asserting that Baca’s claim is valid even more so at the present.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response uniformly provides evidence to support claims, referencing Stanley cups, which can be found in “any high school or middle school classroom in the country” and acknowledges that the purchase of trendy cups is not inherently “bad,” but states that “we place more value, and status, on possessions than we should.” By providing details about how extensive the fad of owning a Stanley cup is, the response connects the evidence with the central claim about the current overconsumption of products by Americans.

The response also focuses on the importance of specific details with a discussion of Girl Scout Cookies and school fundraisers in lieu of “large scale giving,” demonstrating “how attached we are to our stuff.” The commentary connects with the defensible claim as it concludes that “the general trend isn’t one of selfless giving.”

However, at times the response fails to support a clear claim. While paragraph 3 provides some specific evidence (having “the right car or the right house”), the commentary here is limited in clearly explaining the relationship between possessions and mental health. It states these things “will only ever satisfy us on a temporal level” without any further elaboration. This lack of elaboration is also demonstrated with the Stanley cup example. The reliance on the generalization that “We buy massive amounts” of Stanley cups makes less clear the relationship between the widespread purchase of Stanley cups and Baca’s implicit claim about the American tendency to overvalue possessions instead of human connections or experiences.

Question 3 (continued)

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not meet the criteria for receiving the sophistication point for crafting a nuanced argument. While the response does offer context for the developing argument, the context often relies on generalizations, such as “While societies throughout the history of the world” in paragraph 2, as well as the use of the second person “you” in paragraph 3. These generalizations do not situate the argument in any specific way and only hint at other relevant positions. While the language of the response is usually clear, it is not consistently vivid and persuasive.

Sample: 3C **Score: 1-2-0**

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response presents a thesis with a defensible position in the first sentence: “In modern America we have come to value possessions highly compared to experiences.” The response agrees with Baca’s claim without elaborating on the reasons or significance of Americans’ lack of value for experiences over possessions.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 2

The response includes some specific, relevant evidence such as how people “post their cool new sports car” when referring to the power of social media in conveying the effect of social media on lives. However, the response focuses here on possessions in terms of conveying power to those who possess “cool” things. This reference does not connect with a line of reasoning because it fails to show how this power contributes to Americans’ lack of valuing experiences over possessions.

The response refers to having possessions relating to the American Dream along with a mention of Madonna’s song “Material Girl.” While these may look like specific evidence, they are not fully integrated into the response to support a line of reasoning. Since no clear line of reasoning had been established in the beginning, it has not yet become clear how this choice of evidence connects to the stated thesis. While the response refers to possessions as offering easy access to dopamine through possessions being able to “validate our material objects,” this simplistic and repetitive explanation does not strengthen the line of reasoning.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for sophistication. The response only hints at a broader argument when it states that “We value material things (like cars, houses, and pictures) subconsciously because they provide us with an easy access to dopamine.” An attempt at developing a line of reasoning is evident in the response, yet it does not create a nuanced argument. Finally, the response includes only general and simplistic language which does not enhance the argument.