2024

AP® Seminar Performance Task 2

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

Inside:

Individual Written Argument

- ☑ **Scoring Guidelines**
- ☑ **Student Samples**
- ☑ **Scoring Commentary**

Individual Written Argument (IWA) 48 points

General Scoring Notes

When applying the rubric for each individual row, you should award the score for that row based solely upon the criteria indicated for that row, according to the preponderance of evidence.

0 (Zero) Scores

- A score of 0 is assigned to a single row of the rubric when the response displays a below-minimum level of quality as identified in that row of the rubric.
- Scores of 0 are assigned to all rows of the rubric when the response is **off-topic**; a repetition of a prompt; entirely crossed-out; a drawing or other markings; a presentation (or other off-task format); or a response in a language other than English.

Off-Topic Decision:

For the purpose of the IWA, if the response is not in any way related to a theme connecting at least two of the stimulus materials it will be counted as off-topic and will receive a score of 0.

- Considering the student-oriented scoring approach of the College Board, readers should reward the student who derives their ideas from at least two of the stimulus materials, even if they wandered away from them as they pursued their topic.
- If you can infer any connection to a theme derived from two or more stimulus materials, the response should be scored. A failure to adequately incorporate the stimulus materials falls under rubric row 1, not here.

A READER SHOULD NEVER SCORE A PAPER AS OFF-TOPIC. INSTEAD, DEFER THE RESPONSE TO YOUR TABLE LEADER.

NR (No Response)

A score of NR is assigned to responses that are blank.

<table>
<tr><th>Reporting Category</th><th colspan="2">Scoring Criteria</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Row 1

Understand and Analyze Context

(0 or 5 points)</td><td>0 points
The response does not incorporate any of the stimulus material, or, at most, it is mentioned in only one sentence.
OR
The response includes a discussion of at least one of the stimulus materials; however, it does not contribute to the argument.</td><td>5 points
The response demonstrates the relevance of at least one of the stimulus materials to the argument by integrating it as part of the response. (For example, as providing relevant context for the research question, or as evidence to support relevant claims.)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Typical responses that earn 0 points include a reference to the stimulus material that:
Is tangential.
May misrepresent what the sources are discussing/arguing or may use the source in such a way that ignores its context.
Is only used for a definition or facts that could be obtained from other, more relevant sources.
Is no more than a jumping-off point for the student’s argument, no more than a perfunctory mention.
Could be deleted with little to no effect on the response (i.e., it does not serve a purpose that enhances, forwards and/or directly supports the argument).</td><td>Typical responses that earn 5 points include a reference to the stimulus material that:
Reflects an accurate understanding of the source and demonstrates an understanding of its context (e.g., date, region, topic).
AND
Presents an essential and authentic reference to the source, which if deleted, would change or weaken the argument.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Additional Notes
References to stimulus materials may be included multiple times in the response; only one successful integration of stimulus material is required to earn points.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th>Reporting Category</th><th colspan="2">Scoring Criteria</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Row 2

Understand and Analyze Context

(0 or 5 points)</td><td>0 points
The response either provides no context.
OR
The response makes simplistic references to or general statements about the context of the research question.</td><td>5 points
The response explains the significance or importance of the research question by situating it within a larger context.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Typical responses that earn 0 points:
Provide unsubstantiated assertions without explanations (e.g., “this is important”).
May provide contextual details, but they are tangential to the research question and/or argument.
Provide overly broad, generalized statements about context.
Provide context for only part of the question or argument.</td><td>Typical responses that earn 5 points:
Provide specific and relevant details (i.e., what, who, when, where) for all elements of the research question and/or argument.
AND
Convey a sense of urgency or establish the importance of the research question and/or argument.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Additional Notes
Context is usually (but not always) found in the first few paragraphs.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th>Reporting Category</th><th colspan="3">Scoring Criteria</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Row 3

Understand and Analyze Perspective

(0, 6, or 9 points)</td><td>0 points
The response provides only a single perspective.
OR
The response identifies and offers opinions or unsubstantiated statements about different perspectives that may be overly simplified.</td><td>6 points
The response describes multiple perspectives and identifies some relevant similarities or differences between them.</td><td>9 points
The response evaluates multiple perspectives (and synthesizes them) by drawing relevant connections between them, considering objections, implications, and limitations.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Typical responses that earn 0 points:
Provide only one perspective.
May use a lens or lenses that all work to convey the same point of view.
Convey alternative perspectives as personal opinions or assertions without evidence (it is unclear whether or not they are from sources because of vague or missing attribution).
Provide perspectives that are isolated from each other without comparison.
Provide perspectives that are oversimplified by treating many voices, stakeholders, or stances as one.</td><td>Typical responses that earn 6 points:
Make general comparisons between perspectives describing only basic agreement or disagreement.
Explain that disagreement/agreement exists, but they do not explain how by clarifying the points on which they agree or disagree.</td><td>Typical responses that earn 9 points:
Elaborate on the connections among different perspectives.
Use the details from different sources or perspectives to demonstrate specific agreement or disagreement among perspectives (i.e., evaluate comparative strengths and weaknesses of different perspectives by placing them in dialogue).</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Additional Notes
A lens is a filter through which an issue or topic is considered or examined.
A perspective is “a point of view conveyed through an argument.” (This means the source’s argument). Facts, topics, and general stakeholder points of view are not perspectives.</td></tr>
</table>

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
Row 4 **Establish Argument** **(0, 8, or 12 points)**	**0 points** The response provides only unsubstantiated opinions or claims. OR The response summarizes information (no argument). The response employs inadequate reasoning due to minimal connections between claims and evidence.	**8 points** The argument presents a claim with some flaws in reasoning. The response is logically organized, but the reasoning may be faulty or underdeveloped. OR The response may be well-reasoned but illogical in its organization. The conclusion may be only partially related to the research question or thesis.	**12 points** The response is a clear and convincing argument. The response is logically organized and well-reasoned by connecting claims and evidence, leading to a plausible, well-aligned conclusion.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Typical responses that earn 0 points: • Base the argument on opinion(s). • Seek to explain a topic, rather than take a position (e.g., report, summary, chronicle, etc.). • Provide a contrived solution to a non-existent problem or completely lack a conclusion. • Provide an argument that is very difficult to discern, that contradicts itself, or is invalid.	**Typical responses that earn 8 points:** • Organize the argument well OR link evidence and claims well in discrete sections, but do not do both. In other words, the response may fail to explain how evidence supports a claim—i.e., it lacks commentary--OR the overall organization of the response is difficult to follow, even though it has done an adequate job of commenting on the evidence. • Provide evidence that often drives the argument, rather than contributing to the response's argument. • Present an argument that simply repeats but does not develop. • Provide a conclusion* that lacks either enough detail to assess plausibility or is not fully aligned with the research question.	**Typical responses that earn 12 points:** • Organize information in a way that is often signposted or explicit. • Provide commentary that explains fully how evidence supports claims (i.e., the commentary will engage with the content of the evidence to draw conclusions). • Provide an argument that is driven by student voice (commentary). • Integrate alternate views, perhaps by engaging with counterclaims or using them to demonstrate a nuanced understanding. • Provide a conclusion* that is fully aligned with the research question. • Present enough detail to assess the plausibility of the conclusion* (perhaps with an assessment of limitations and implications).
	Additional Notes *The conclusion of the argument may also take the form of a resolution or solution, depending upon the nature of the question/argument.		

<table>
<tr><th>Reporting Category</th><th colspan="3">Scoring Criteria</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Row 5

Select and Use Evidence

(0, 6, or 9 points)</td><td>0 points
Any evidence presented in the response is predominantly irrelevant and/or lacks credibility.</td><td>6 points
The response includes mostly relevant and credible evidence.</td><td>9 points
The response includes relevant, credible and sufficient evidence to support its argument.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Typical responses that earn 0 points:
Include many sources that are not credible for the context in which they are used.
Include no well-vetted sources (i.e., scholarly, peer-reviewed, credentialed authors, independently verified, or from government or other reputable organizations) beyond the stimulus materials.
May include a well-vetted source that is not used effectively (e.g., trivial selection, not aligned with claim, misrepresented).</td><td>Typical responses that earn 6 points:
Draw from a variety of sources that are relevant to the topic and credible for the context in most cases, but those sources are primarily non-scholarly.
Include many sources that are referenced rather than explained.
Provide evidence that does not fully support claims (e.g., there are some gaps and trivial selections).
May cite several scholarly works, but select excerpts that only convey general or simplistic ideas OR include at least one piece of scholarly work that is used effectively.</td><td>Typical responses that earn 9 points:
Provide evidence that fully supports claims.
Effectively connect evidence to the argument, even if the relevance of the evidence is not initially apparent.
Provide purposeful analysis and evaluation of evidence used (i.e., goes beyond mere citation or reference).
Make purposeful use of relevant evidence from a variety of scholarly work (e.g., peer-reviewed, credentialed authors, independently verified, primary sources, etc.).</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Additional Notes
Review the Bibliography or Works Cited.
Review individual instances of selected evidence throughout (commentary about the evidence).
General reference guides such as encyclopedias and dictionaries do not fulfill the requirement for a well-vetted source.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th>Reporting Category</th><th colspan="3">Scoring Criteria</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Row 6

Apply Conventions

(0, 3, or 5 points)</td><td>0 points
The response is missing a bibliography/works cited OR the response is largely missing in-text citations/ footnotes.</td><td>3 points
The response attributes or cites sources used through the use of in-text citations or footnotes, but not always accurately. The bibliography or works cited references sources using a generally consistent style with some errors.</td><td>5 points
The response attributes, accurately cites and integrates the sources used through the use of in-text citations or footnotes. The bibliography or works cited accurately references sources using a consistent style.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Typical responses that earn 0 points:
Include internal citations, but no bibliography (or vice versa).
Provide little or no evidence of successful linking of in-text citations to bibliographic references (e.g., in-text references are to titles but bibliographic references are listed by author; titles are different in the text and in the works cited).</td><td>Typical responses that earn 3 points:
Provide some uniformity in citation style.
Include unclear references or errors in citations, (e.g., citations with missing elements or essential elements that must be guessed from a url).
Provide some successful linking of citations to bibliographic references.
Provide some successful attributive phrasing and/or in-text parenthetical citations.</td><td>Typical responses that earn 5 points:
Contain few flaws.
Provide consistent evidence of linking internal citations to bibliographic references.
Include consistent and clear attributive phrasing and/or in-text parenthetical citations.
Scoring note: The response cannot score 5 points if essential elements of citations (i.e., author/organization, title, publication, date) are consistently missing.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Additional Notes
In AP Seminar, there is no requirement for using a particular style sheet; however, responses must use a style that is consistent and complete.
Check the bibliography for consistency in style and inclusion of essential elements.
Check for clarity of in-text citations.
Check to make sure all in-text citations match the bibliography (without extensive search).</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th>Reporting Category</th><th colspan="3">Scoring Criteria</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Row 7

Apply Conventions

(0, 2, or 3 points)</td><td>0 points
The response has many grammatical flaws, is difficult to understand, or is written in a style inappropriate for an academic audience.</td><td>2 points
The response is mostly clear but may contain some flaws in grammar or a few instances of a style inappropriate for an academic audience.</td><td>3 points
The response creates variety, emphasis, and interest to the reader through the use of effective sentences and precision of word choice. The written style is consistently appropriate for an academic audience, although the response may have a few errors in grammar and style.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Typical responses that earn 0 points:
Contain multiple grammatical errors that make reading difficult.
Use an overall style that is colloquial or in other ways not appropriate for an academic paper.
Provide too few sentences to evaluate or the student’s own words are indistinguishable from paraphrases of sources.</td><td>Typical responses that earn 2 points:
Contain some instances of errors that occasionally make reading difficult.
Lapse into colloquial language.
Demonstrate imprecise word choice.</td><td>Typical responses that earn 3 points:
Contain few flaws.
Use clear prose that maintains an academic or scholarly tone.
Use words and syntax to enhance communication of complex ideas throughout.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Additional Notes
Readers should focus on the sentences written by the student, not those quoted or derived from sources.</td></tr>
</table>

The Mental Benefits of Free-Solo Climbing

AP Seminar

30 April 2024

Word Count: 2198

Free-soloing is the art of climbing mountains without a safety rope. It is a dangerous sport that is physically and mentally demanding. Catherine Palmer, (2002) identifies the mortality rate of free-soloing as "between 1 in 5 to 1 in 10 deaths for every success." So why do it? It is seen as the peak of climbing accomplishments, but are the risks justified? Reinhold Messner, a free-solo climber, explains, "Maybe half of the leading solo climbers of all times died in the mountains" which "is tragic and difficult to defend." The philosophy, he argues, is when "going in an adventure, you need difficulties. You need danger. If death was not a possibility, coming out would be nothing." (Mortimer & Rosen, 2021). However, free-soloing is a controversy among not only the climbing community, but among inexperienced observers of the sport. Falling and dying is the main concern revolving around free-soloing since the effects can spread beyond the loss of the climber. Family and friends are left to grieve the seemingly preventable loss. Palmer writes an account about Alison Hargreaves, a climber who died in 1998 while descending from a successful solo ascent of Mount Everest. "As a mother of two, Hargreaves had effectively abandoned her children by taking such extraordinary risks." Hence, "Hargreaves ensured she would never dramatically, if fatally, distinguish herself from the crowd as a climber, but rather as an errant, unthinking mother" (Palmer, 2002). While these losses are tragic, it is ultimately the climber's decision as to whether or not to climb. The call to the mountain is obviously strong enough to keep them climbing, despite the risk and overwhelming possibility of death. This extreme form of climbing embodies the human passion for pushing the limits of what is possible in order to explore the unknown. Doris Lessing's short story "Through the Tunnel" from *The Habit of Loving,* (1957) captures this passion to explore through the story of Jerry, a young boy working towards the goal of exploring a mysterious tunnel underwater. Lessing emphasizes the need that Jerry feels to explore the tunnel, writing, "He knew he must

find his way through that cave, or hole, or tunnel, and out the other side" (Lessing, 1957). By listing the possibilities of what the tunnel could be: a "cave, or hole, or tunnel" Lessing effectively shows that the tunnel is an intriguing mystery, and that Jerry is intent on exploring this unknown natural phenomenon—much like how solo climbers go out to explore and climb mountains—despite the dangers. Furthermore, the excerpt: "he would do it. He would do it if it killed him" (Lessing, 1957) reflects the nature of solo climbing: climbing despite the looming threat of death. This determination to explore the unknown, to climb mountains solo, despite the dangers, provokes the question: To what extent is free-soloing mentally beneficial to climbers, and are the risks worth the reward of accomplishment? When examining the proven mental benefits of challenge and risk in other activities, and accounting for the fact that sometimes genuine experiences need the threat of death to produce genuine results, it becomes clear that soloing, though controversial, has a definite answer. While free-soloing is extremely dangerous, it is also extremely mentally beneficial and is worth all the risks that come with the endeavor.

First, however, the obvious issue needs to be addressed: the dangers of climbing. Mountain climbing in general is already established as dangerous; avalanches can occur at any time, without warning, and even climbing with a rope can pose severe injuries from a fall. Audun Hetland and Joar Vittersø, (2012) assert that "high altitude mountain climbing is associated with a significant mortality rate." Furthermore, Rodrigo Granzotto Peron, (2009) explains, the world's second highest mountain, K2, "is also one of the most dangerous, with a fatality rate of nearly 21%." (as cited in Hetland & Vittersø, 2012). With such a high death rate, it is no wonder many people oppose the idea of free-soloing. In addition to the death rate, the reason for climbing is often frowned upon, due to misunderstanding. The majority of people, usually those who are not accustomed to climbing, deem free-soloing as 'crazy' or 'reckless,' something only an adrenaline

junkie would partake in. On the contrary, the motive for climbing is usually deliberate, rather than impulsive and thrill-seeking. Marvin Zuckerman and Michael Kuhlman, (2000) define impulsivity as "the tendency to enter into situations, or rapidly respond to cues for potential reward, without much planning or deliberation and without consideration of potential punishment" (as cited in Llewellyn, 2008). Free-soloing, however, requires careful consideration that is not found in impulsive behavior. Palmer acknowledges that "rock climbing require[s] a certain level of technical skill to [be] perform[ed] safely, as well as an awareness of local weather conditions" (Palmer, 2002). Thus, free-soloing has no room for impulsivity; there is too much planning involved in ensuring a successful and safe climb for it to be performed on a whim. Gino Steinmetz, Mara Assman, Jan Hubert and Dominik Saul, (2022) conducted a study which presented similar results to Palmer's acknowledgement. They discovered that "conscientiousness is significantly higher in recreational climbers compared to regular athletes," which could be explained by the "potentially fatal" aspect of climbing. This conscientiousness could "be lifesaving in certain situations," due to the responsibility for one's own safety. Together, Steinmetz, Assman, Hubert, and Saul's findings, and Palmer's observation suggest that free-soloing is a well thought out and carefully executed sport—not an impulsive one.

Climbers recognize the risk that comes with free-soloing. It is the reason they plan their ascents so carefully, taking into account every possibility and being prepared to improvise on the fly. In order to climb, however, they must first overcome the instinctual fear of climbing in order to free-solo. In a study conducted by Zanette et al., (2019) birds were exposed to predators and monitored for signs of PTSD. The exposed birds suffered from enduring effects on their behavior, in particular, more "time spent 'vigilant and immobile,'" which suggests that frightening and traumatic experiences can cause fear paralysis. Free-soloing is no different when

it comes to frightening and even traumatic experiences that could occur up on the mountain. A slip, or even a single glance downwards has the potential to make a climber freeze in fear. Thus, free-soloers must push through this primitive, instinctual fear paralysis to begin and continue to climb. This mental strength to do so is crucial to ensure they can safely complete a climb without freezing in a state of panic mid-way up the mountain. Marc-André Leclerc, a solo climber, recounts moments of fear paralysis. He notes that when encountering a difficult situation, he has to make the choice to either continue climbing, or "have a melt down" and freeze. "You gotta do one or the other," Leclerc adds, "And that process of evaluating the situation and then getting it together and carrying on, it's a challenge every time" (Mortimer & Rosen, 2021). Additionally, there is a general conflict within climbers concerning whether or not to climb. Jon Hughes writes about the mountaineer Kurt Diemberger's conflicting emotions about climbing. "For this Austrian climber the mountains are a source of joy but at the same time are loaded with risk and with danger," and, the emotional high gained from climbing is "offset by the ever-present threat of the fall" (Hughes, 2010). Despite the risks, many free-solo climbers still climb, training themselves to be prepared for all possible outcomes of the climb. Thus, climbers have accepted the reality that death is an undeniable possibility, yet they still climb, further supporting the theory that there are greater mental benefits to be gained from these climbs.

But what mental benefits are there to be gained? Everything about free-solo climbing is meticulous and deliberate, but also nerve-racking and terrifying. So how could there be any mental benefit that could result from this demanding and risky sport? Karen Ersche et al. (2005) suggest that risk taking and "the motivation to take risks may result from the desire to seek pleasure or relieve negative affect" (as cited in Llewellyn, 2008). Thus, there may be some benefits—both mentally and emotionally—to engaging in risky activities, such as free-soloing.

Additionally, simply being out in nature may have positive effects on climbers' mental health. Devin Goldsmith, (2021) reports, "Physical immersion in nature certainly plays a role in positive mental health" and stresses that "nature is proven to be a therapeutic outlet," typically more effective than "standard counseling and medication" (Goldsmith, 2021). Free-soloing involves intense and direct interactions within nature and fosters inner struggles of man vs. nature and man vs. self, both of which promote personal and character growth. Furthermore, Hughes explains, "An alternative way of understanding the act of climbing a mountain is to conceive of it not as a means of 'defeating' or 'overcoming' nature but of re-engaging primally with life" (Hughes, 2010). Goldsmith and Hughes' observations suggest that simply engaging in the act of climbing outdoors is mentally refreshing to climbers, especially in today's modern society where nature can be hard to come by. However, this explanation only accounts for the outdoor aspects of free-soloing and not free-soloing itself. Katharina Luttenberger et al., (2015) conducted a study examining how effective an indoor form of free-soloing, bouldering, was as a therapeutic treatment for depression. They found a significant positive effect on patients' measures of depression, and determined that "therapeutic bouldering may offer an effective treatment for depression." After further examination, taking into account the "high concentration," physical fitness, coordination, and the engagement of "intense emotions," as a result of climbing, Luttenberger et al. concluded "it seems a logical development to use the positive aspects of bouldering as a therapy for mental illnesses" (Luttenberger et al., 2015). Luttenberger et al.'s findings suggest that climbing without a rope effectively stimulates dopamine within the brain on smaller, shorter climbs, and point to longer, free-solo climbs yielding even more successful results. The benefits of free-soloing do not stop there. Lawrence Hamilton writes about the emotional benefits of free-soloing. "Climbing provides its practitioners with a wide variety of

emotional and aesthetic rewards." Every experience offered from the scenery, relationships with friends, and the "mental and physical joys of exertion and challenge" can provide these rewards. "Such personal rewards are unquestionably powerful and important motives for climbing" (Hamilton, 1979). Emotional rewards, while some may argue are not as important or of the same value as mental benefits, are still an important aspect of what is to be gained from free-soloing. Emotions are typically one of the driving forces behind decisions, and could be a large part of the reason to climb untethered.

If free-soloing were to become a normalized therapeutic method for coping with and treating depression, along with other mental illnesses or struggles, it would mean the normalization of free-soloing—and climbing—as a sport. Recently, climbing itself has gained popularity, making its debut in the olympic games in 2020. Free-soloing, however, while becoming publicized via documentaries such as *Free Solo* (2018) and *The Alpinist* (2021), is still controversial and generally unknown. Different places around the world have different views and levels of acceptance of free-soloing, and the reason for this is found in the high levels of risk of free-soloing. For instance, Schoffl et al. (2010) examined European insurance policies for rock climbing, and found that many "limit or exclude rock and ice climbing participation." However, they also found a British policy which provides "global coverage for different forms of climbing." Thus, the "popular public and professional" evaluation of the dangers of climbing "may not be fully informed." These conflicting views can easily be fixed with education and research about free-soloing. Free-soloing, however, is not for everyone. The amount of experience, strength, and knowledge that is required to embark on these climbs is not quickly nor easily obtained. Therefore, publicizing free-soloing could unintentionally lead to inexperienced climbers trying their hand at free-soloing, unaware of the prerequisites. Leclerc describes the

challenges and dangers of climbing, and what needs to be taken into account in order to climb safely. “You control what you’re doing, but you can’t control what the mountain’s doing,” Leclerc says. “The mountains are alive all around you and you’re kind of at their mercy.” Avalanches and seracs can collapse randomly. Climbers have to be capable of “read[ing] the signals that the mountains are sending,” and take into account the weather conditions (Mortimer & Rosen, 2021). These demanding and strict requirements limit the number of people capable of climbing, thus limiting the number of people who can gain the mental rewards of free-soloing.

Free-soloing does indeed offer a variety of mental benefits from multiple different outlets and aspects of climbing such as being out in nature, the concentration and conscientiousness required to climb, and the satisfaction gained from completing a challenging goal. While free-soloing is not for everyone, it should be continued to be pursued by ambitious and experienced climbers who wish to discover what the world has to offer. Due to the small community of free-solo climbers, not much pre-existing data is held regarding solo climbing. Future research should be conducted in order to better understand the wide range of benefits proposed in this essay when actually applied to solo climbing.

Word count: 2198

Reference

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The Effects of Pressure Related to Social media on the Mental health of Student Athletes

AP Seminar

April 2024

Word Count:1732

The Effects of Pressure Related to Social media on the Mental health of Student Athletes

It comes as no surprise that the prevalence of social media usage over the past decade has had many impacts on the lives of student athletes, both good and bad, but the pressures that are related to social media usage are the most overlooked. Margot Putukian, the Chief Medical Officer for Major League Soccer and Assistant Director of Medical Services at Princeton University, found that “Global social media use rates have nearly tripled with 95% of 13–27-year-olds using YouTube and other platforms such as TikTok (67%), Instagram (62%) and Snapchat (59%) and 35% of users doing so ‘almost constantly'”. Along with this, the American Psychological Association has declared that the negative impacts that result from the use of social media should be considered an urgent public health issue. However, social media has become particularly popular amongst student athletes due to the benefits it provides to them. Generally, social media allows people to gain opportunities worldwide and can provide a very useful means of communication amongst athletes. Unfortunately, along with all these benefits, athletes that use social media can be exposed to different forms of cyberbullying, including body-shaming and the presentation of unrealistic body standards online (Putukian, 2024). The reason why this pressure related to social media has taken such a toll on student athletes is because there are limited opportunities for them to find support. This is because vulnerability in the sports community has been stigmatized historically, due to the competitiveness of athletic culture, along with the fact that emotions are generally seen as a sign of weakness. As of recently, many sports medicine organizations, including the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have begun to research the importance of a student athlete’s mental health, trying to identify the causes of mental health challenges in the sports community (Shewale, 2024). Although there is a lot of research that

demonstrates the ways in which participating in sports has a positive impact on an athlete's mental health, the NCAA does acknowledge that the athletic environment can simultaneously exacerbate an athlete's mental health issues. Pressure related to social media can be caused by the obligations faced by athletes to use or promote institutions on their social media pages, along with the encouragement of social comparisons on social media, which may lead to an increase in mental health disorders, or potentially act as a motivator in the sports community.

To begin, it is important to address why so many student athletes use social media, and what it is primarily used for. Most athletes begin to interact with social media during the early adolescent period, and once part of a high-level team, professional sports have agreements with media press organizations. (Ng, 2024) At the high-school level there are usually no expectations or obligations for athletes to interact with any media, however many coaches and recruiters look for athletes who are more involved in this aspect. At the collegiate level, athletes are required to represent their institutions through media appearances, however they require administrative approval before speaking to journalists or making these appearances. In a 2020 study performed by the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications observed student-athlete handbooks and found that “almost 58 of them explicitly forbade athletes from speaking to journalists without permission from the athletic department” (Ng, 2024). Along with this, many athletes use social media to promote their own personal brands or look for opportunities to gain financial support, as social media is an ideal platform to promote their own personal brands and acts as a means for athletes to communicate with and engage with their consumers (Doyle, 2019). Some studies found that the encouragement of social media use amongst athletes can allow for interaction with and discussion with fans, spectators and other players. Along with this, social media is particularly beneficial to athletes in sports that are not

widely broadcasted and need to be promoted through social media platforms in order to increase the financial support and opportunities provided to them. (Ng, 2024) However, the benefits that come with the use of social media amongst student athletes are limited, as it was found that media exposure has been proven to have both positive and negative impacts on an athlete's performance. In a general public setting, the increase of social media use has caused a proportional increase in rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders (Ng, 2024). To further exacerbate this problem, it was found that the years in which an athlete may peak in their performance is also the period in their life when they are most susceptible to developing a mental health disorder (Rice, 2016). In the end, however, it is the way in which athletes may choose to cope with and address the stressors they face determines how their mental health is impacted. Although there are some sport organizations that are trying to destigmatize mental health disorders in student athlete groups, there are many that believe it is a sign of weakness and downplay the importance of providing support to athletes on this subject.

With the increase of pressure on athletes to have and use social media, it is more common than expected to see social comparisons happening between the athletes as a cause of it. Athletes that use social media can be exposed to different forms of cyberbullying, particularly in the form of body-shaming and unrealistic body standards being presented online. In fact, a study done on adolescent German athletes found that a longer daily social media use led to an increased negative mood, dysfunctional eating patterns and many other mental health symptoms. (Putukian, 2024) In this particular case, the presence of social comparisons and societal standards is what is causing athletes to have negative emotions related to social media usage. Adolescent athletes must deal with pressures to perform well both in school and in their sport, having to invest a lot of time and energy in training, recovery processes and competitions. Due to

this, adolescents who are athletes have a higher risk of developing eating disorders than non-athlete adolescents (Putukian, 2024). This is caused by the expectations placed upon athletes to act and look a certain way. The presence of social comparisons may be attributed to the fact that social media promotes unrealistic role models. This is also known as negative cognitive appraisal of self, and it is particularly dangerous because it can lead to dissatisfaction and depression (Fiedler, 2023). It is hard to limit the amount of social comparison on social media due to the largely competitive nature of the athletic field, as there are always self-comparisons and comparisons to other athletes being made. In fact, this is often encouraged by coaches and peers as a method of improvement and growth, and acts as a form of self-motivation for student athletes. However, a comparison to unattainable standards can mean a drastic increase of pressure on a student athlete, even leading to strong negative emotions and the development of low self-concept (Diel, 2021). Overall, these social comparisons are a relevant and urgent problem to address as in the long run, the pressure being placed on student athletes comes from the commentary and opinions of people online, which often lead to less vulnerability and honesty, especially when it comes to asking for support and help with mental health struggles. In modern day, there is a very unfiltered sports discourse environment on social media, as people can comment on whatever they like. The use of social media is mainly driven by ego, and comparisons between different athlete groups. Simone Biles is an example of the ways in which pressure from social media may have tremendous impacts on a student athlete's mental health, and going against that ingrained media culture is seen as being both weak and emotional (Thompson, 2021).

Despite this fact, social media has become a large part of the athlete community, and there is a reason for that. Social media does benefit the athlete in some ways, including through

increasing popularity and therefore funding for the athlete. Along with this, social media can encourage team communication and relationship building. Many social media apps are used as a way to create meaningful conversation between athletes, their teams and their opponents. Many athletes do use social media to promote non-profit organizations and to advocate for social justice (Merrill, 2023). However, there are many ways in which media training can be incorporated into the lives of student athletes in order to develop healthy social media interaction habits. As of current, many student athletes see opponents being portrayed on social media, or are compared to them and their sports performances, which was found to act as an external motivational factor and influences athletes goal setting and self-efficacy. Social media usage was also found to decrease athletes' cognitive loads, and allow them to better regulate their fatigue and emotions (Sakalidis, 2022). In order to continue to improve, athletes must make constant adjustments to their training and skill levels to match those of their competitive counterparts, which leads to the encouragement of social comparison, both in real life and on social media. Results showed that social comparison was found to lead to motivation in student athletes should the comparison standard be moderate as opposed to extreme. Essentially, the most significant part is whether the person they are comparing themselves to creates an unattainable standard for them (Diel, 2021). The criticism and abuse that can be found online, along with the pressure that comes with social comparison can work against athletes to undermine their self-esteem and in turn decrease their athletic performance. It is important to address this problem through an educational standpoint, providing in depth explanations and methods to prevent further mental health disorders from arising due to social media usage (Meggs, 2021). These educational programs would help limit the effects of negative comments on social media and increase the self-empowerment skills that athletes have. The most effective way in which this

training/educating can be integrated is directly through sports clubs and programs. Having personalized help for a specific target problem can help mitigate any negative impacts of social media pressures on both mental health and sports performance. There is no question that the pressures of social media on student athletes have many impacts on them, both good and bad, so it is important to address possible solutions and limitations to help mitigate those impacts.

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Physical & Mental Courage: What's the difference?

AP Seminar Student

Introduction

Did you know, you've been building courage your entire life, without even realizing it? According to Sandstone Care, an organization dedicated to helping people overcome trauma, says that childhood trauma is even more beneficial in building courage that lasts your entire life. Yes, that time you broke your knee as a kid, that time you were bullied, these examples of trauma all lead to two things, resilience and courage. Both physical and mental trauma produce courage, but why? Which one is better at doing so?

Physical Trauma and Physical Courage

Though difficult, the relationship between physical trauma and the ability to have physical courage can be seen. As many people have come to find, traumatic events like breaking your leg or having surgery can cause both courage and resilience, but why? According to Chapter 3 of Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services published by the National Library of Medicine, the thing that varies between the same traumatic injuries is the reaction. Even so, "The impact of trauma can be subtle, insidious, or outright destructive", it al; just depends on the response. If you choose to let the broken leg disable you for the entire period of healing, you'll lose out on both learning what it's like to deal with such an impactful injury as well as the potential courage for further injuries that may come. Similarly, in paralytic injuries, most of the ability to recover is owed to the courage the initial injury creates. Furthermore, in the example provided in the stimulus material, "Through the Tunnel", the young boy earned an immense amount of courage from both the mental and physical trauma of swimming

through that tunnel. One can learn both from the courage to do such an act as well as the courage earned afterward. However, one can also argue that these traumatic events are more destructive than they are supportive. Unfortunately, yes, they can cause things like PTSD, but this only proves that the long-term effects of trauma can also cause long-term courage development. For example, according to Greater Good Magazine, a magazine dedicated to building a better future for readers, previous traumatic events can lead to “increased life satisfaction”. To do this, one must learn to overcome adversity and work through intense psychological stress. This also illustrates why physical trauma could be more courage-building than mental trauma, as physical trauma requires both mental and physical endurance.

Mental Trauma and Mental Courage

On the other hand, there is mental trauma. A few examples are psychological events like witnessing violence or losing a loved one. According to Sandstone Care, there are also types of trauma, type 1 is an event at any point in life, and type 2 is events that occur in the development phase of your life, which can have a more lifelong effect. The effects of these events also vary, depending on the response. However, common responses to events tend to be more evident. For many, it leads to depression or other short-term effects, at least for type 1 events. Type 2 events could lead to PTSD, long-term mental illness, and other effects that are a pain to deal with. Though this could show that mental trauma is good at building courage, it also shows that events like these are typically more destructive. Another downside of mental trauma is that in many cases, benefits take any amount of time from hours to decades to be reaped. It all

depends on how the person goes about handling the trauma. Similarly, for outside perspectives like therapists, it can be hard to find the issue at heart as the human mind tends to hold back on exposing faults.

Conclusion

In essence, though both mental and physical courage are built throughout our lives, physical trauma can benefit both the body and mind in building courage.

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Performance Task 2
Individual Written Argument

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

Overview

This task assessed the student's ability to:

- Review a set of stimulus materials and decide on a theme derived from at least **two** of the sources.
- Formulate a research question directly related to that theme.
- Conduct research and evaluate relevant, credible, and scholarly materials to answer the research question.
- Formulate a well-reasoned argument with a clear line of reasoning and a plausible conclusion.
- Evaluate and acknowledge counterarguments and different perspectives.
- Write a 2,000-word argument that is logically organized and supported by credible evidence.

Sample: A
1 Understand and Analyze Context Score: 5
2 Understand and Analyze Context Score: 5
3 Understand and Analyze Perspective Score: 9
4 Establish Argument Score: 12
5 Select and Use Evidence Score: 9
6 Apply Conventions (Attribution & Citation) Score: 5
7 Apply Conventions (Style & Grammar) Score: 3

Row 1: Understand and Analyze Context (Connection to Stimulus)

The response earned a score of **5** for this row because it uses two of the stimulus materials—the Lessing story and the Zanette research—as examples of two of the writer's specific claims. Lessing is used to demonstrate the powerful lure of exploring "an intriguing mystery" or an "unknown natural phenomenon." Zanette's research on birds, while less successfully integrated, is used to generally establish the "instinctual fear paralysis" that humans also experience. The commentaries on both stimulus sources demonstrate an engagement with and an acceptable level of understanding, albeit with a better understanding and integration of the Lessing source.

Row 2: Understand and Analyze Context (for the Response's Argument)

The response earned a score of **5** for this row because it appropriately situates the argument in the context of the small body of research that has been done on this relatively little-known sport, which the writer notes, made its Olympic debut in 2020. The response works to make the argument important to an audience broader than a niche community of climbers. The response uses the Lessing short story to invoke the human "passion to explore." It nods to enduring issues: (1) the promise and perils involved in high-risk ventures, and (2) the struggles of "man vs. nature" and "man vs. self." It also points to a larger social benefit: free-solo climbing as a treatment for depression. Overall, the response keeps the research focus narrow, but broadens the context to make clear why even those not engaged in the sport should recognize both the dramatic risks and potential benefits.

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Row 3: Understand and Analyze Perspective
The response earned a score of **9** for this row because the response synthesizes multiple perspectives as it weaves its argument. While occasionally the "as cited in Llewellyn"-style attribution poses a possible issue (i.e., has Llewellyn done the synthesis? Or the writer?), in this case, the response has ample evidence of connecting multiple perspectives to the various sources listed on the bibliography. (For instance, on page 4, Zuckerman and Kuhlman—a perspective derived from Llewellyn—is placed in dialog with perspectives from Palmer, as well as Steinmetz et al.) The response also considers objections, implications, and limitations as it introduces various perspectives. See, for example, on page 3, the paragraph beginning, "First, however, the obvious issue needs to be addressed: the dangers of climbing," a perspective also alluded to in the introduction with the alarming statistic from Palmer.

Row 4: Establish Argument
The response earned a score of **12** for this row because the argument is clear, logically organized, and convincing. Throughout, the writer's voice controls the argument. Claims and evidence are presented and scrutinized and lead to a well-aligned answer to the question of whether the "mental benefits" outweigh the high risks involved in the sport. The first two sentences of the concluding paragraph answer the question, offering a resolution that the argument has logically been moving toward: "Free-soloing does indeed offer a variety of mental benefits" and "should be continued to be pursued by ambitious and experienced climbers who wish to discover what the world has to offer."

Row 5: Select and Use Evidence
The response earned a score of **9** for this row because it draws from relevant and credible evidence sufficient to support its argument. While dated sources could be seen as an issue, the response makes two moves to demonstrate an awareness of this potential problem: (1) It mentions in the conclusion the dearth of "pre-existing data ... regarding to solo climbing." And (2) When possible, it updates the scholarship. See, for example, on p. 4, where Steinmetz et.al. in a 2022 publication, "conducted a study which presented similar results to Palmer's", which was published in 2002. The last two sentences of the conclusion indirectly signal defensible choices that the writer has made: to restrict the context of the research to solo-climbing, cite foundational research on this narrow topic, and update it as it becomes available.

Row 6: Apply Conventions (Attribution & Citation)
The response earned a score of **5** for this row because it clearly attributes, accurately cites, and effectively integrates its research sources. Although it is difficult to tell with the first entry on the Reference page what kind of source is being used, all other sources (stimulus sources excluded) contain essential elements to distinguish peer-reviewed journal articles from source types such as a film. Overall, flaws are minor and few: Titles of journals are haphazardly italicized (or not). Overall, attribution and citation skills are well-demonstrated.

Row 7: Apply Conventions (Style & Grammar)
The response earned a score of **3** for this row because precise word choice and controlled sentences ensure that the prose is capable of expressing complex ideas. The argument is noteworthy for its clarity and readability.

Performance Task 2
Individual Written Argument

Sample: B
1 Understand and Analyze Context Score: 5
2 Understand and Analyze Context Score: 5
3 Understand and Analyze Perspective Score: 6
4 Establish Argument Score: 8
5 Select and Use Evidence Score: 6
6 Apply Conventions (Attribution & Citation) Score: 3
7 Apply Conventions (Style & Grammar) Score: 2

Row 1: Understand and Analyze Context (Connection to Stimulus)
The response earned a score of **5** because it demonstrates the relevance of at least one of the stimulus materials. While the Simone Biles piece (see bottom of page 5) is the only direct reference to the stimulus materials, it links to the response's claim that "the presence of social comparisons and societal standards is what is causing athletes to have negative emotions related to social media usage" (p. 4). Although ideally the response would have developed the relevance through some discussion—e.g., distinguishing between professional and student athletes to better match the argument's context— the brief reference is sufficient to demonstrate an "accurate understanding of the [stimulus] source and its context." It minimally meets the criterion for an authentic reference and thus earns the 5 points.

Row 2: Understand and Analyze Context (for the Response's Argument)
The response earned a score of **5** because there are specific and relevant details that somewhat situate the research question within a larger context. Although the "where" [U.S. & international] is overly broad, other markers are more specific: the "what" [social media], the "who" [student athletes], and the "when" [contemporary]. These details sufficiently ground an inquiry into the question of how social media pressures impact mental health disorders in student athletes. Urgency is conveyed in the first paragraph: The response references Putukian's finding that "Global social media use rates have tripled" and that "athletes that use social media can be exposed to different forms of cyberbullying, including body-shaming and the presentation of unrealistic body standards." Overall, the response situates the argument in a larger context and makes a case for the inquiry.

Row 3: Understand and Analyze Perspective
The response earned a score of **6** because it at times describes multiple perspectives and identifies similarities and differences among them. At other times, points of view are not clearly tethered to sources: For example, the response discusses the Ng source multiple times (see pages 3 and 4), but that source is not listed in the Works Cited. Merrill likewise does not appear. Where perspectives are clearly tethered to sources, the connections are often described generally rather than evaluated specifically. For example, on p. 5, the response includes detailed arguments from Putukian and Fiedler only to articulate these very general points: "[E]xpectations [are] placed upon athletes to act and look a certain way," and "[T]here are always self-comparisons and comparisons to other athletes being made." Overall, in places in which the perspectives are identified and tethered to a source, the discussion of connections remains general.

Performance Task 2
Individual Written Argument

Row 4: Establish Argument
The response earned a score of **8** because it contains a problem/solution argument (problem: social media impacts the mental health of student athletes; solution: "media training can be incorporated into the lives of students…." (p. 6). Ultimately, the argument does not provide enough detail to assess the plausibility of the claim(s), nor does it provide enough detailed evidence to support a conclusion that this educational approach would be effective (i.e., the solution is sketched, but not developed). Additionally, unclear attribution throughout makes it difficult to discern whether arguments are advanced by sources or by the writer.

Row 5: Select and Use Evidence
The response earned a score of **6** because the Works Cited page contains a variety of scholarly sources that are relevant to the topic. However, the sources are used to convey "general or simplistic ideas." For example, the response discusses the peer-reviewed Putukian source from the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* to make a general point about "negative emotions": "[T]he presence of social comparisons and societal standards is causing athletes to have negative emotions related to social media usage" (p. 4). Overall, the sources are well-selected, but not well-used.

Row 6: Apply Conventions (Attribution & Citation)
The response earned a score of **3** because, while there is some uniformity in citation style, there are significant linkage errors. For example, "Ng," which is referenced several times in the body of the paper, is not linked to a citation on the Works Cited page. "Merril" (page 6) is also not listed on the Works Cited page. Moreover, the absence of attributive phrasing makes it difficult to discern where paraphrased material begins. Overall, citation/attribution skills are unevenly demonstrated in this response.

Row 7: Apply Conventions (Style & Grammar)
The response earned a score of **2** because, while mostly clear, the prose and sentence structure are not always able to clearly articulate complex ideas. Word choice is frequently imprecise ("good and bad," "negative or positive"). Unclear sentences frequently obscure logic [e.g., "This is because vulnerability in the sports community has been stigmatized historically, due to the competitiveness of athletic culture, along with the fact that emotions are generally seen as a sign of weakness" p. 2, or "Pressure related to social media can be caused by the obligations faced by athletes to use or promote institutions on their social media pages, along with the encouragement of social comparisons on social media, which may lead to an increase in mental health disorders, or potentially act as a motivator in the sports community" (p. 3).]

Performance Task 2
Individual Written Argument

Sample: C
1 Understand and Analyze Context Score: 0
2 Understand and Analyze Context Score: 0
3 Understand and Analyze Perspective Score: 0
4 Establish Argument Score: 0
5 Select and Use Evidence Score: 0
6 Apply Conventions (Attribution & Citation) Score: 0
7 Apply Conventions (Style & Grammar) Score: 0

Row 1: Understand and Analyze Context (Connection to Stimulus)
The response earned a score of **0**. The response focuses on a topic (courage) that would be considered a theme in the stimulus package and discusses Lessing's "Through the Tunnel" on page 1. Despite the use of the signal word "Furthermore," the use of the stimulus material does not further the claim that recovering from paralytic injuries creates courage. Nor is the separate claim that "the young boy earned an immense amount of courage…" developed.

Row 2: Understand and Analyze Context (for the Response's Argument)
The response earned a score of **0**. The response makes general and simplistic references to the context of the research question: "that time you broke your knee as a kid, that time you were bullied." No rationale or justification is provided for exploring either question: Why trauma produces courage? or Whether physical or mental trauma is better at producing courage?

Row 3: Understand and Analyze Perspective
The response earned a score of **0**. The response claims to explore the difference between physical and mental trauma, but the information related to and relayed from sources does not draw the distinction ("the impact of trauma" "types of trauma, type 1 … and type 2") or suggest trauma produces courage ("can be subtle, insidious, or outright destructive" "leads to depression or other short term effects"). In short, the information provided from Chapter 3 of the NLM text and from the Sandstone Care blog convey a single perspective: that the effects of trauma are complex and varied.

Row 4: Establish Argument
The response earned a score of **0**. It is difficult to locate the argument in this response. The response states in its conclusion that "though both mental and physical courage are built throughout our lives, physical trauma can benefit both the body and mind in building courage." If this statement is the argument, it is invalid as it is overly broad and based on opinion. The body of the response is composed of unsubstantiated claims.

Row 5: Select and Use Evidence
The response earned a score of **0**. In addition to the stimulus material, the Works Cited page refers to a blog and a magazine. The one relevant and credible source listed is not used effectively in the response.

Row 6: Apply Conventions (Attribution & Citation)
The response earned a score of **0**. The response does not contain in-text citations, so no linking occurs to the Works Cited page entries. In the text, the response refers to the "Sandstone Care" source, but the source is listed by author (Quinn) on the Works Cited page.

Performance Task 2
Individual Written Argument

Row 7: Apply Conventions (Style & Grammar)
The response earned a score of **0**. The response contains many examples of prose not acceptable for an academic paper. The language choice is often not precise: “as many people have come to find,” and “is owed to the courage.” Furthermore, the response shifts between second and third person perspective throughout.