
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**

Amanda Gorman is the first National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States, an honor given to a young person for exceptional artistic expression, civic engagement, and social impact. In a 2021 interview in *Time* magazine, when asked how to maintain optimism¹ in challenging times, Gorman stated: “Optimism shouldn’t be seen as opposed to pessimism,² but in conversation with it. Your optimism will never be as powerful as it is in that exact moment when you want to give it up.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Gorman’s claim about the relationship between optimism and pessimism is valid.

¹a tendency to view things in a positive light

²a tendency to view things in a negative light

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	
Row A Thesis (0–1 points)	0 points For any of the following: <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. 	1 point Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <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. Examples that do not earn this point: Do not take a position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Optimism is when you view things positively.”</i> Address the topic of the prompt but are not defensible—it is an obvious fact stated as a claim <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“There are both optimists and pessimists in this world.”</i> 	Responses that earn this point: Respond to the prompt by taking a position on the extent to which Gorman’s claim about the relationship between optimism and pessimism is valid, rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt. Clearly take a position rather than just stating that there are pros/cons. Examples that earn this point: Present a defensible position that responds to the prompt. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Gorman’s claim about optimism and pessimism is valid.”</i> <i>“While Gorman has a good point about the power of optimism in the face of extreme struggle, pessimism can be an equally powerful and overwhelming force.”</i> <i>“Unwavering optimism is most powerful when the dialogue with pessimism becomes contentious. It is these moments that allow a strength of character to emerge.”</i>
	Additional Notes: <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 Note: <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"> Crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities or tensions. 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. Making effective rhetorical choices that consistently strengthen the force and impact of the student’s argument. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
	Additional Note: <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)

Amanda Gorman's statement is a reflection of the the dicotomy of pessimism and optamism as less of a relationship between two diametrically opposed viewpoints, but instead, two sides of the same coin of situational and world wide awarness. Where pessimism is a recognition of what one considiers to be ill in the world and the prevelence of said ills, it does not have to extend to someones own position on whether the burdens of these ills will be lightened, as optomism being the snese that things will get better can be present in the recgonition of ones, or the worlds woes.

This idea of optomism and pessismism being able to exist in the same place is indicitive of a balance between pragmatic and honest evaluation that struggle and hardship is occuring, while maintaining the hope that whether or not the world becomes a brighter place, oneself can find contentment and safety for themselves and those they care for. This duality of thought is especially prevelent in Cormac Mcarthy's "*The Road*" a story of a man and his son navigating and trying to survive through a world ravaged by a non-discriped calamity. The story maintains a third person omniscient perspective of the man and his son, who are refered to only as such. The world which they inhabit is one of slow decay, desolation, and violence, where the father, faced by his own mortality and single minded drive to protect his son, is faced with many dangers ranging from the cruelty and violence of blood-thirsty cults, to the slow and deadly embrace of world where the sun is blotted from the sky, leaving only winter and famine. Despite these somber and depressing conditions, the idea of "the coast" that is referenced throughout the book, as the driving force of the two character's travel provides the idea that in times of strife, there is always a light in the darkness to cling to, which is not demisnished by addressing the horro and complications of ones own surrounding and wider state of the world.

The relationship between pessimism and optimism is typically represented as having a "glass half full" vs "glass half empty" mindset, referencing in this metaphor, whether someone recognizes that they still have half a cup of water, or bemones the water that they no longer have, denoting a difference in mindset of focusing on what is still positive or what negative events have occurred. The focus of these mindset, (hough differing on their position) is still on the same topic, which can reflect a wide range of circumstances. During times of economic recession or even depression, it is not uncommon for people to focus on how these set backs may negatively effect their well being, not because these people only focus on the negatives in life, but instead a recognition of the issues that face them and their surroundings, that here being a lack of income, purchasing power, or supply that could impact the structure of their work, home life or social standing. This recognition of ones woes is often still paired with an assurance that things will get better, whether in the case of economy, it be a hope in an upturn on a global scale, or the assurance that smart planning and the health of ones community can provide. As Gorman states, optamism is usually amplified by the presence of pessimistic circumstances, due to the drive and hope that these issues can be overcome whether by the work and struggle of oneself, fueled by an optimistic assurance or the everchanging tide of the globe swinging in ones favor, creating a dichotomy for most where pessimism is more a tool to catalyze optamism than being its oposite force.

Sample 3B (1 of 1)

Optimism shouldn't be seen as apposed to pessimism because there are multiple different situations where one can outshine the other and that is not always a bad thing because not every situation should be met with optimism, not every situation should be met with pessimism, and being able to find that balance is essential in figuring out how to deal with difficult situations.

Not every situation can be met with optimism and allowing for some of the negative to seep in can help find a solution to a problem. One example of this is in the book *The Lost Hero*, one of the main characters, Leo, has an issue that he tries to solve with an invention, but only for it not to work repeatedly. Leo is optimistic and continues to try and solve the problem with his invention and it fails every time, until he becomes a little pessimistic and realizes that the answer was a different invention and eventually he solves the problem that has remained unsolved until he was willing to look at it from a less optimistic view. This evidence shows that not all problems can be met with optimism and that looking at issues from a negative point of view can help solve problems rather than continue to fail.

On the other hand, not every situation can be met with pessimism either because sometimes a positive outlook can help make a person happier and change their outlook on life. One example of this is in the book *Quiet*-a book about introverts and extroverts and what makes them different- the author talks about how introverts tend to have a negative view on life and that is something that can make them introverted. The author also talks about how introverts that gain more optimism on how they get things done, tend to be happier and more effecient in whatever they are doing. This evidence prove that even having just a little optimism can help with a person's well-being and let them learn to have a more positive outlook on life.

Finally, finding a balance between optimism and pessimism is important to figuring out how to deal with difficult situations. One example of this is in the book, *The Prison Healer*, there are two main characters: Jaren, who is overly optimistic, and Kiva who was extreemly pessimistic. The two had to work together to escape the prison they were in, Jaren being optimistic that someone was going to help save them while Kiva was very pessimistic and thought they were never going to escape the prison. Both characters had to understand where the other was coming from and find the balance between their optimism and pessimism in order to escape the prison. After trying and failing, the two eventually came up with a plan that allowed them to escape, Jaren's optimism giving Kiva hope that they could escape, and Kiva's pessimism teaching Jaren that the challenges they face were going to be difficult. The two found that balance and escaped the prison and were now free to wonder the world together. This example shows that beinng willing to be a little more optimistic or pessimistic can help solve a lot of problems that may have seem impossible before. Finding the balance between optimism and pessimism is essential to figuring out how to deal with any situation, easy or difficult.

Optimism and pessimism are not opposites of each other and there are multiple situations one can be better then the other, yet it is important to remember that not every situation can be met with optimism, not every can should be met with pessimism, and being able to find that balance is essential in figuring out how to deal with challenging situations.

Sample 3C (1 of 1)

Gormans claim that optimism should be viewed in conversation with pessimism, rather than opposed to it is invalid. Optimism is not the same or similar to pessimism. Optimism is viewing things in a positive light, and pessimism is viewing things in a negative light.

I had a friend who is a complete pessimist. Everytime something goes even slightly wrong, he completely gives up and just sees the worst in his situation. There were many times where he would get a bad grade on a class assignment and then not try for the rest of the unit because he belived that there was no hope for him to learn the rest of the unit. This would lead to him getting bad grades on his tests, which would then further lead him to believe that it was over. If he would've just been able to be optimistic about things, then he would've known that one bad outcome in life should not be able to define your whole situation. If optimism is in conversation with pessismism, like Gorman says, then shouldn't he have known that their was hope? Optimism can not be in conversation with pessimism because their dictionary definitons are the complete oppisite of eachother. My friend always thought that he was completely done for after something bad happened to him. He was convinced that there was no coming back ever. He would fold over and give up when he didn't get what he wanted. This belief cause him to constantly fail at everything he did, and now he barely comes to school, has no real future, and I am no longer friends with him because of his pessimism. Optimism can not be in conversation with pessimism because of people like my old friend who never see hope in anything they do.

On the other side of my old friend, there are many people who are optimistic about everything. They are able to stand strong in the face of adversity because they know that there is always a way out. Optimism is the opposite of pessimism because people like this will be far more succesful than my old friend. They know that their is hope. They know that one bad grade does not define who you are in the class. Optimism is able to drive people to be great, while pessimism leads people to give up. They are not the same, they are complete opposites. People who are always optimistic about everything will force their way through troubles and they know that if they start to feel pessimistic about their situation, it can lead to them losing hope. Where people who are pessimistic about everything never even had hope to begin with, and lose motivation immediatley. The theme of optimism versus pessimism is hope. People who are optimistic will have hope, and people who are pessimistic will not. This goes agaisnt Gorman's claim that they are in conversation because the two are, by definition, opposites. If they were 'in conversation' as Gorman claims, the definition of pessimism would be, "when someone is not feeling optimistic." The true definition of pessimism is a tendency to view things in a negative light. Constantly viewing things in a negative light will lead to someone giving up.

Optimism is not in conversation with pessimism. They are oppisites. Optimism is being able to find hope in any situation, and pessimism is believing that there is no hope in many situations.

Question 3

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

Overview

NEW for 2025: The question overviews can be found in the *Chief Reader Report on Student Responses on AP Central*.

Sample: 3A

Score: 1-4-1

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response offers a defensible position in paragraph 3: “As Gorman states, optamism is usually amplified by the presence of pessimistic circumstances, due to the drive and hope that these issues can be overcome whether by the work and struggle of oneself, fueled by an optamistic assurance or the everchanging tide of the globe swinging in ones favor, creating a dichotomy for most where pessimism is more a tool to catalyze optamism than being its oposite force.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The response provides specific evidence to support all claims in its line of reasoning. For example, it states “This duality of thought is especially prevelent in Cormac Mccarthy’s ‘*The Road*’ a story of a man and his son navigating and trying to survive through a world ravaged by a non-discriped calamity.”

The commentary consistently and clearly explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning, such as when it states, “the idea of ‘the coast’ that is referenced throughout the book, as the driving force of the two character’s travel provides the idea that in times of strife, there is always a light in the darkness to cling to, which is not demisnished by addressing the horro and complications of ones own surrounding and wider state of the world.”

Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The response demonstrates sophistication of thought by employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive from its opening sentence, “Amanda Gorman’s statment is a reflection of the the dicotomy of pessimism and optamism as less of a relationship between two diametrically opposed viewpoints, but instead, two sides of the same coin of situational and world wide awarness” to its discussion of the glass metaphor in the last paragraph: “whether someone recognizes that they still have half a cup of water, or bemones the water that they no longer have, denoting a difference in mindest of focusing on what is still postive or what negative events have occured.”

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

The response offers a defensible position in paragraph 5: “Optimism and pessimism are not opposites of each other and there are multiple situations one can be better than the other, yet it is important to remember that not every situation can be met with optimism, not every can should be met with pessimism, and being able to find that balance is essential in figuring out how to deal with challenging situations.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response provides specific evidence to support all three claims in its line of reasoning. For example, to support its claim, “Not every situation can be met with optimism” and allowing for some of the negative to seep in can help find a solution to a problem, the response states, “One example of this is in the book *The Lost Hero*, one of the main characters, Leo, has an issue that he tries to solve with an invention, but only for it not to work repeatedly.”

The commentary explains how some of the evidence supports a claim, such as when it explains that Leo’s issue “has remained unsolved until he was willing to look at it from a less optimistic view. This evidence shows that not all problems can be met with optimism and that looking at issues from a negative point of view can help solve problems rather than continue to fail.”

However, some commentary does not effectively support a claim. In paragraph 3, the response supports the claim, but the commentary provided for the evidence does not clearly connect to the claim that “Optimism and pessimism are not opposites of each other.” This is seen when it states, “This evidence prove that even having just a little optimism can help with a person’s well-being and let them learn to have a more positive outlook on life.”

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.

Question 3 (continued)

Sample: 3C
Score: 1-2-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response offers a defensible position in sentence 1: “Gormans claim that optimism should be viewed in conversation with pessimism, rather than opposed to it is invalid.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 2

The response provides relevant evidence. Some evidence is specific: “I had a friend who is a complete pessimist.” However, it also includes broad generalities, such as, “There are many people who are optimistic about everything. They are able to stand strong in the face of adversity because they know that there is always a way out.”

The response provides commentary that explains how some of the evidence relates to the argument, such as, “My friend always thought that he was completely done for after something bad happened to him. He was convinced that there was no coming back ever. He would fold over and give up when he didn’t get what he wanted. This belief cause him to constantly fail at everything he did, and now he barely comes to school, has no real future, and I am no longer friends with him because of his pessimism.” However, it does not connect the evidence to a claim, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established.

Instead, the response makes one point well (“Constantly viewing things in a negative light will lead to someone giving up”) but does not make multiple supporting claims, such as in paragraph 2.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.