

2026



AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Scoring Guidelines

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Question 1: Poetry Analysis**6 points**

In Christopher Gilbert’s poem “Marking Time,” published in 1984, the speaker observes his surroundings during a morning jog. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Gilbert uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker’s complex reflections while jogging.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use 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: - 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 interpretation of the poem.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Only restate the prompt. - Make a generalized comment about the poem that doesn't respond to the prompt. - Describe the poem or features of the poem rather than making a claim that requires a defense.	Responses that earn this point: Provide a defensible interpretation of the speaker's complex reflections while jogging.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <i>"The poem uses literary techniques to show the complex reflections of a jogger while on his run."</i> Do not relate to the prompt <i>"I think the difficulty of jogging can make it hard to concentrate on a particular thing."</i> Describe the poem or features of the poem <i>"The speaker seems to be jogging in a place where there are a lot of animals."</i>	Examples that earn this point: Provide a defensible interpretation <i>"The speaker's thoughts turn from his own body to the surrounding landscape to reflections on his relationship with his sister. This structure perfectly captures how repetitive exercise allows the mind to turn inward."</i> <i>"Gilbert's use of long sentences that flow across many lines shows the uninterrupted stream of his thoughts."</i> <i>"The poem explores the thoughts of its speaker using repetition of words having to do with marking, counting, and breathing, showing how the speaker returns to certain ideas and images even as he considers an important relationship."</i>
	Additional Notes: - The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. - The thesis may be anywhere within the response. - For a thesis to be defensible, the poem must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. - 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 student’s 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. AND Explains how at least one literary element or technique in the poem contributes to its meaning.	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. AND Explains how multiple literary elements or techniques in the poem contribute to its meaning.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
	Typical responses that earn 0 points: - Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. - May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant.	Typical responses that earn 1 point: - Tend to focus on summary or description of a poem rather than specific details or techniques. - Mention literary elements, devices, or techniques with little or no explanation.	Typical responses that earn 2 points: - 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: - Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. - Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the poem to build an interpretation. - 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: - Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. - Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the poem to build an interpretation. - Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained. - Explain how the writer’s use of multiple literary techniques contributes to the student’s interpretation of the poem.
Additional Notes: - Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. - To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same literary element or technique if each instance further contributes to the meaning of the poem.					

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 develops a complex literary argument.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Attempt to contextualize their interpretation, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>Human experiences always include...</i>” OR “<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”). - Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (“<i>While another reader may see...</i>” OR “<i>Though the poem could be said to...</i>”). - Make a single statement about how an interpretation of the poem comments on something thematic without consistently maintaining that thematic interpretation. - Oversimplify complexities in the poem. - Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument.	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate a sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following: - Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the poem. - Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. - Accounting for alternative interpretations of the poem. - Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
	Additional Notes: 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.	

Question 2: Prose Fiction Analysis**6 points**

The following excerpt is from Aimee Bender’s novel *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*, published in 2010. In this passage, the narrator, Rose, discovers that when she eats food she has the unique ability to perceive the feelings of the person who prepared it. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Bender uses literary elements and techniques to convey the narrator’s complex experience of eating the chocolate lemon cake her mother has prepared.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use 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: - 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 interpretation of the passage.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Only restate the prompt. - Make a generalized comment about the passage that doesn't respond to the prompt. - Describe the passage or features of the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense.	Responses that earn this point: Provide a defensible interpretation of the narrator's complex experience of eating the chocolate lemon cake her mother has prepared.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <i>"This passage shows how Rose has a unique ability to perceive the feelings of the person who prepared the food she is eating."</i> Do not respond to the prompt but make a generalized comment <i>"Birthdays are not always happy occasions."</i> Describe the passage or features of the passage <i>"In the passage, Rose seems to have a very strong sense of taste."</i>	Examples that earn this point: Provide a defensible interpretation <i>"In the passage, Rose's experience of the cake's taste as 'hollow' shows that her relationship with her mother is flawed."</i> <i>"The narrator recognizes that there is something wrong with the lemon cake but tries to convince herself it is not there. As her later conversation with her mother shows, this reflects her inability to tell the unhappy truth about her experience."</i> <i>"The contrast between the ideas the narrator tries to convince herself of and the vivid details of her actual experience eating the cake show the insistent power of her ability to perceive another person's feelings."</i>
Additional Notes: - The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. - The thesis may be anywhere within the response. - For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. - 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 student’s 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. AND Explains how at least one literary element or technique in the passage contributes to its meaning.	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. AND Explains how multiple literary elements or techniques in the passage contribute to its meaning.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
	Typical responses that earn 0 points: - Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. - May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant.	Typical responses that earn 1 point: - Tend to focus on overarching narrative developments or description of a passage rather than specific details or techniques. - Mention literary elements, devices, or techniques with little or no explanation.	Typical responses that earn 2 points: - 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: - Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. - Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an interpretation. - 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: - Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. - Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an interpretation. - Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained. - Explain how the writer’s use of multiple literary techniques contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage.
Additional Notes: - Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. - To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same literary element or technique if each instance further contributes to the meaning of the passage.					

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 develops a complex literary argument.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Attempt to contextualize their interpretation, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (<i>“Human experiences always include...” OR “In a world where...” OR “Since the beginning of time...”</i>). - Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (<i>“While another reader may see...” OR “Though the passage could be said to...”</i>). - Make a single statement about how an interpretation of the passage comments on something thematic without consistently maintaining that thematic interpretation. - Oversimplify complexities in the passage. - Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument.	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate a sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following: - Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the passage. - Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. - Accounting for alternative interpretations of the passage. - Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
Additional Notes: 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.		

Question 3: Literary Argument**6 points**

Many works of literature depict a conflict between the old and the new: Old worlds, old ways, or old values clash with newer ones.

Either from your own reading or from the following list, choose a work of fiction in which there is marked tension between the old and the new. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the tension between the old and the new contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

In your response, you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- 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: - 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 interpretation of the selected work.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Only restate the prompt. - Make a generalized comment about the selected work that doesn't respond to the prompt.	Responses that earn this point: - Provide a defensible interpretation of the tension between the old and the new in the selected work. OR - Make a claim about how the tension between the old and the new contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <i>"Many works of literature center around a conflict between an old way of doing things and a new one."</i> Do not respond to the prompt but make a generalized comment about the selected work <i>"In <u>The Great Gatsby</u>, Gatsby has made his money in ways that are legally questionable."</i> <i>"<u>There There</u> by Tommy Orange centers around a powwow in Oakland, California, that the characters attend."</i> <i>"The experiences of a Dominican family living in New York City are explored in <u>How the García Girls Lost Their Accents</u>."</i>	Examples that earn this point: Provides a defensible interpretation <i>"In her novel <u>Ceremony</u>, Leslie Marmon Silko tells the story of a man whose distinctly modern problem, PTSD caused by his experience in a World War, requires old ceremonial practices to be updated for the present day."</i> <i>"<u>North and South</u> dramatizes the tension between the old and the new through the conflicting values of Margaret Hale, the daughter of a minister, and John Thornton, a factory owner."</i> <i>"The novel <u>James</u> shows the conflict between old and new by rewriting the older novel <u>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</u> from the perspective of the character Jim."</i>
Additional Notes: - The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. - The thesis may be anywhere within the response. - A thesis that offers a defensible claim about the tension between the old and the new in the selected work may earn the point; any reasonable student interpretation of "the tension between the old and the new" is acceptable. - For a thesis to be defensible, the selected work must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. - 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: - Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. - May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant.	Typical responses that earn 1 point: Tend to focus on overarching narrative developments or description of a selected work rather than specific details.	Typical responses that earn 2 points: - 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: - Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. - Focus on the importance of specific details from the selected work to build an interpretation. - 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: - Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. - Focus on the importance of specific details from the selected work to build an interpretation. - 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: - Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. - To earn the fourth point in this row, the response must address the interpretation of the selected work as a whole.					

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 develops a complex literary argument.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: • Attempt to contextualize their interpretation, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>Human experiences always include...</i>” OR “<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”). • Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (“<i>While another reader may see...</i>” OR “<i>Though the text could be said to...</i>”). • Oversimplify complexities of the topic and/or the selected work. • Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument.	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate a sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following: 1. Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the selected work. 2. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. 3. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the text. 4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
	Additional Notes: • 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.	