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

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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#### **Free Response Question 1**

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**Synthesis Essay****6 points**

In the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, handwriting instruction (print and cursive) was virtually universal in schools in the United States. By contrast, little if any time is devoted to such lessons today. While some argue that handwriting instruction should still have a place in schooling, others maintain that digital technologies have rendered such instruction unnecessary.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Write an essay that synthesizes material from at least three of the sources and develops your position on the place, if any, of handwriting instruction in today's schools.

Source A (Gillis)

Source B (worksheet)

Source C (Trubek)

Source D (Kysilko)

Source E (Pot)

Source F (graph)

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
- Select and use evidence from at least three of the provided sources to support your line of reasoning. Indicate clearly the sources used through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. Sources may be cited as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the description in parentheses.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<p><b>Row A</b></p> <p><b>Thesis</b></p> <p><b>(0-1 points)</b></p>	<p><b>0 points</b></p> <p>For any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no defensible thesis.</li> <li>• The intended thesis only restates the prompt.</li> <li>• The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim.</li> <li>• There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1 point</b></p> <p>Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.</p>
<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>		
<p><b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only restate the prompt.</li> <li>• Do not take a position, or the position is vague or must be inferred.</li> <li>• Equivocate or summarize others’ arguments but not the student’s (e.g., some people say it’s good, some people say it’s bad).</li> <li>• State an obvious fact rather than making a claim that requires a defense.</li> </ul>		<p><b>Responses that earn this point:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to the prompt by developing a position on handwriting instruction in today’s schools, rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt. Clearly take a position rather than just stating there are pros/cons.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples that do not earn this point:</b></p> <p><b>Restate the prompt</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Some people think that handwriting should still be taught in schools today, but others think that it’s not necessary anymore because everything is digital.”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Address the topic of the prompt, but do not take a position</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Kids no longer learn handwriting in school, and there are several reasons why that’s the case.”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Address the topic of the prompt but state an obvious fact as a claim</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“As opposed to previous centuries, nowadays handwriting is not really taught in schools anymore.”</i></li> </ul>		<p><b>Examples that earn this point:</b></p> <p><b>Present a defensible position that responds to the prompt</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Even though it may seem old-fashioned, handwriting should still be taught in schools today.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“While it makes sense for students to learn keyboarding and other skills that will prepare them for a digital world, handwriting instruction still holds a place in a modern child’s education.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Given the fact that most kids learn on computers and tablets nowadays, it makes no sense for them to spend time learning an obsolete skill such as cursive handwriting, although they still will need to learn how to print.”</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Additional Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity.</li> <li>• The thesis may be anywhere within the response.</li> <li>• For a thesis to be defensible, the sources must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>• The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn’t do so to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>• A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning.</li> </ul>		

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

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

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Penmanship is a practice that has held true throughout centuries of world history. Through its beginnings as pictographic scripts and its historic practical applications, penmanship has managed to connect people for as long as time can tell. Through letters between lovers via carrier pigeon or through signatures on legal documents, penmanship finds its place in society day in and day out. While to some, cursive handwriting in particular may seem a futile use of motor skills, for many, ~~it creating~~ the track of a pen ~~across~~ forming loops across a paper allows them not only several ~~to~~ cognitive benefits, but a sense of individuality and normalcy in a rapidly digitalizing world. Cursive handwriting, though it may seem outdated in the ~~to~~ digital age, is vital in society not only because it promotes cognitive development, but because it can be used to define a person and his/her work; due to the importance of cursive writing, ~~it was~~ its teaching must not be omitted from schooling.

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In practice, the benefits of cursive writing cannot be outshone, especially in terms of cognitive development. Studies show that ~~the~~ the act of handwriting not only develops the regions of the brain associated with thinking, short term memory, and language, but that it also helps with information retention (Kysilko). While the cognitive benefits of handwriting are obviously not ~~limited~~ limited to cursive handwriting, manuscript, while ~~slow~~ it yields the same benefits, is slower. Many proponents of eliminating the teaching of cursive in schools argue that it would allow time for other more important skills to be developed, cursive helps save time in the long run for many due to its fluidity in practice. Others claim that cursive should not be taught as a necessity but as an art, but this perspective, too, fails to acknowledge that it contradicts the primary doctrine of the anti-cursive: that the teaching of the skill is a waste of time (Pot). The historical significance of cursive is also important to note when discussing the viability of

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

teaching cursive in school in the modern days. In American history, cursive was taught as a method of cultivating an American identity, as Dickie Drake, Alabama state representative stated, "cursive writing identifies you as much as your physical features do." (Trubek). In order to maintain the sense of individuality Americans hold so dearly, handwriting must continue to be taught. Perhaps handwriting serves a superficial means of maintaining individuality, but in a rapidly digitalizing world, sometimes the only way to distinguish the writing of two people is by handwriting. Unless you are a seasoned stylographer, 12pt Times New Roman font essays written by anonymous authors will be impossible to distinguish. <sup>two</sup> No matter how you look at it, cursive handwriting is a vital component of human development and must continue to be taught in schools.

Perhaps the most common rebuttal to the importance of teaching cursive handwriting in school is that traditional writing methods are becoming obsolete,

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

but studies show that it clearly not the case. As schools opt to print fewer copies of worksheets in favor of digital annotation and many textbooks are releasing digital forms, a widespread falsehood is gaining popularity: the idea that schools are "[writing] off the traditional route of writing" (Gillis). In casual observation of more affluent areas, this may seem obvious, but studies show that a greater ~~more~~ amount of time in class many elementary classrooms is spent hand-writing than is spent using technology (graph).

This simple disproof eliminates the top argument against ~~the~~ the continuation of teaching cursive handwriting, thus denying anti-cursive sentiment is unarguable.

The teaching of cursive in schools offers copious amounts of benefits for students, that cannot effectively be replaced by any other methods. Cursive is ingrained in the minds of people everywhere, perhaps due to its lasting effect on human cognitive development. So I implore you, student or not, to continue to study cursive. Allow yourself a return to ~~the~~ tradition after a



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

long day at the computer. You just  
might leave a mark on your mind forever.

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In the present, handwriting instruction in schools has dwindled from its former prominence. The digital age offers alternatives to developing and mastering penmanship, so the art is less prioritized compared to alternative common core subjects. Although handwriting instruction develops motor skills, it has little place in schools because it is inefficient compared to technology, and other subjects are more useful in the real world.

Many advocates for handwriting instruction cite motor skill development as a reason to keep the practice. For instance, the National Association of State Boards of Education claims practicing handwriting both requires and augments fine motor skills (Source D). However, attributing motor skills primarily to this course is not entirely accurate. Edutardist Justin Pat rebutted the claim by explaining other uses of hands such as playing video games are equally as effective (Source E). While handwriting instruction may indeed promote superior motor skills, alternative options render taking periods of class for this one section irrelevant. Therefore, the development of fine motor skills is not exclusive to handwriting instruction, so schools should instead consider less time-intensive alternatives.

One flaw of handwriting instruction is its decreasing efficiency with the advent of digital typing. Author Anne Trobels of the New York Times admits even third graders spend less time ~~writing~~ typing than writing (Source C). Because note-taking skills are maximized with the author's speed, if one method is noticeably slower than others, the most efficient option should be in fact be practiced. In fact, a survey of elementary school students

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

It is quantified the difference in speed as handwriting takes over twice as much time as computer use (Source P). Due to this extreme discrepancy, practicing handwriting instruction in schools should not be encouraged when technology is generally far superior for the students whose skills must be cultivated. As such, handwriting instruction has little place in the modern era.

Finally, other subjects should ~~be~~ take the place of the spent instructing handwriting in schools. Specifically in regards to specialized handwriting like cursive, limited school time is better spent on subjects the students will use daily, and even second-grade teacher Deb Fitzgerald agrees schools should "move on and save class time on other topics" (Source P). Skills such as math should be prioritized for younger children since methods like multiplication are integral to both adult and child life (Source E). Overall, rather than ~~take up limited time~~ devote time to a subject with little use, schools should instead reallocate time to other core topics the student can use in the real world.

In conclusion, while handwriting instruction has some amount of merit with its promotion of motor skills, it poses little worth in schools because of its inefficiency and ~~the~~ lack of physical use.

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Cursive hand writing should not be focused, or taught in school, because it is a waste of time, it is not useful, and technology is more prevalent now.

Teaching cursive writing is a waste of time. If ~~the~~ cursive writing is not mandatory then that can lead students to focus on building a larger vocabulary, which will ultimately make them a stronger writer. In source C the text states in the last paragraph "the changes imposed by the digital age may be good for writers and writing, because they achieve automatically quicker on the keyboard, today's third graders may well become better writers as handwriting takes up less of their education." This piece of text displays how the younger children have a better chance at being better writers because handwriting is not taking much of their time. With this extra time children could be building vocabulary to be a successful writer. Learning cursive writing in school is a waste of time because as the future is approaching the use of cursive is becoming non-existent. Source A states "the experiments most of us have, with 30 minutes a day practicing cursive in class, have gone by the wayside." This is supporting the fact that the time used learning cursive has not been useful to everyday life.

Going along with a waste of time cursive isn't used enough to be beneficial, so why learn it? Many schools have cut it out of the curriculum. Source A states "41 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards for English, which omits cursive handwriting from required curriculum." Source A clearly displays the ideal that cursive handwriting in the school system ~~isn't~~ is a

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

mandatory, because it is stated that 41 states have taken it out of their curriculum.

As time goes on and technology progresses technology will be used more and the use of pencil and paper are going to be more discrete. In addition to that with technology advancing there are going to need to be skills taught about technology. ~~Source A~~ Source A states "The move outside our schools, and in innovative schools, is towards technology". This from source A is simply supporting that technology is taking over, because the world after school is filled with technology. From source C it states "the world is changing, quickly. And while it is hard to make predictions about where technology is headed, it's safe to say the future won't involve a lot of cursive handwriting" with that in mind it is obvious to see with technology advancing the need for cursive handwriting is decreasing.

To conclude, cursive handwriting should not be a skill enforced in school. ~~paper~~

## Question 1

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

### Overview

The synthesis prompt for this year asked students to use material from six provided sources and develop a position on the place, if any, of handwriting instruction in today’s schools. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that presented a defensible position; select and use evidence from at least three of the provided sources to support their line of reasoning—indicating clearly the sources used through direct quotations, paraphrase, or summary; explain how the evidence supported their line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument. The skills required included 2.A, 4.A, 4.B, 4.C, 6.A, 6.B, 6.C, 8.A, 8.B, and 8.C.

We expected these students to develop an argument that consistently demonstrated their understanding of the distinctions being made about cursive vs. manuscript instruction and its importance or lack thereof. This prompt was highly accessible, and nearly all students were able to frame a recognizable response. Their theses were clearly articulated in almost all cases. It appeared that the combination of the new scoring guide and the new stable wording has helped students in that way. The Question Leader makes the important observation that “many lower-half papers were written by students who combed through sources looking for ‘support’ for their own arguments, instead of engaging with the sources,” which was the ultimate aim. By the same token, there were some very accessible places for students to question/engage critically with the sources, and many did so very well. The higher-performing students were also expected to use the sources in conversation with one another in ways that would reveal their sophisticated writing and thinking and their ability to synthesize information in service of their own argument.

### Sample: 1A

**Score: 1-4-1**

#### **Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

The thesis is stated at the end of paragraph 1: “Cursive handwriting, though it may seem outdated in the digital age, is vital in society not only because it promotes cognitive development, but because it can be used to define a person and his/her work; due to the importance of cursive writing, its teaching must not be omitted from schooling.” This is a defensible statement that takes a position on handwriting instruction.

#### **Evidence and Sophistication (0–4 points): 4**

The response develops a sustained line of reasoning both within and between the paragraphs. It moves smoothly back and forth between discussions of the benefits of cursive and rebuttals of typical objections to cursive handwriting instruction. For example, the response cites Source D about the cognitive benefits of cursive, anticipates the counterargument that manuscript would carry the same benefits, and addresses this counterargument with the claim that “manuscript, while it yields the same benefits, is slower.” All of this is done in one sentence. The response consistently exhibits fluid control of the evidence and appropriate explanations of its significance. Whereas less controlled responses tend to quote large pieces of text when less would be appropriate, this response consistently embeds and responds to very specific words and phrases from the sources and integrates them into its explanations.

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

The response consistently displays a vividness and persuasiveness of style that goes beyond the occasional rhetorical flourish. From the crafted introduction that contains relevant details about the history of script to the direct address in the conclusion, the response is vivid. The response also consistently explores complexities and tensions across the sources. Most sources are presented in conjunction with one another in a way that

## Question 1 (continued)

demonstrates a deep understanding of the tensions present and offers a cogent explanation for why the response’s position is ultimately more relevant. Finally, the response consistently explores the broader context of the place of cursive in American society.

### **Sample: 1B**

**Score: 1-3-0**

#### **Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

This response clearly articulates its thesis at the end of paragraph 1: “Although handwriting instruction develops motor skills, it has little place in schools because it is inefficient compared to technology, and other subjects are more useful in the real world.” This multipart claim is defensible and takes a clear position on the subject of handwriting instruction.

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

The response uses a conventional five-paragraph structure, but it distinguishes itself by incorporating evidence from multiple sources clearly and explaining their connection to the thesis. The response organizes multiple claims into a line of reasoning, providing clear explanations of specific evidence. For example, in paragraph 2 the response uses Source D to provide evidence of an opposing point of view, then uses evidence from Source E to refute the claim. The response goes on to explain how the point raised in Source E about video games developing motor skills is applicable to the classroom, saying that “alternative options render taking periods of class for this one section irrelevant” and that “schools should instead consider less time-obtrusive alternatives.” Not all of the evidence in the response is clearly integrated, however. The third paragraph’s claim that Source C “admits even third graders spend less time typing than writing” is a mischaracterization of the significance of the relevant phrase, and the connection to the “decreasing efficiency” of handwriting is not clear. In the same paragraph, the claim that the chart in Source F demonstrates that “handwriting takes over twice as much time as computer use” is also a mischaracterization with little connection to the topic of the paragraph. These lapses prevent the response from having earned the fourth point in Row B.

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

The response does not display a vividness or persuasiveness of style. While its prose is generally functional and workmanlike, it does not serve to highlight the most persuasive parts of the argument. The response does contain a line of reasoning, but it does not explore the complexities or tensions across the sources, nor does it situate the argument in a broader context. Its mischaracterization of several of the sources does not suggest a very sophisticated grasp of the material. The response also does not display especially effective rhetorical choices. Once an adequate explanation has been provided for one point, the response moves on to its next point.

### **Sample: 1C**

**Score: 1-1-0**

#### **Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

The thesis is stated in the first sentence of the passage: “Cursive hand writing should not be focused, or taught in school, because it is a waste of time, it is not useful, and technology is more prevalent now.” Although its phrasing is somewhat confusing, it is a defensible thesis that takes a position on handwriting instruction.

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

The response is characterized by long quotes that are followed by close paraphrases. For example, paragraph 2 includes an extended quotation from Source C that is followed by the paraphrase, “This piece of text displays how the younger children have a better chance of being better writers because handwriting is not taking much of their time.” The commentary that follows, “With this extra time children could be building vocabulary,”

### Question 1 (continued)

attempts to explain the statement, but it is not attached to the argument. Later paragraphs lack even attempts at commentary and consist entirely of close summary of the sources.

**Sophistication (0–1 points): 0**

The response does not display a vividness or persuasiveness of style. It often struggles to find the appropriate word or syntactical structure to convey the underlying idea, as when it asserts in the first sentence that “Cursive handwriting should not be focused, or taught in school.” The response does not develop a line of reasoning, so it could not earn the sophistication point by exploring complexities or tensions across the sources or situating its argument in a broader context. Finally, the response does not display effective rhetorical choices. Its consistent use of a quotation followed by a paraphrase is not a sophisticated structure.