

Question 3

Suggested time—40 minutes.

(This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Colin Powell, a four-star general and former United States secretary of state, wrote in his 1995 autobiography: “[W]e do not have the luxury of collecting information indefinitely. At some point, before we can have every possible fact in hand, we have to decide. The key is not to make quick decisions, but to make timely decisions.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Powell’s claim about making decisions is valid.

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.

Begin your response to this question at the top of a new page in the separate Free Response booklet and fill in the appropriate circle at the top of each page to indicate the question number.

AP[®] English Language and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

Inside:

Free-Response Question 3

- ☒ **Scoring Guidelines**
- ☒ **Student Samples**
- ☒ **Scoring Commentary**

Argument Essay

6 points

Colin Powell, a four-star general and former United States secretary of state, wrote in his 1995 autobiography: “[W]e do not have the luxury of collecting information indefinitely. At some point, before we can have every possible fact in hand, we have to decide. The key is not to make quick decisions, but to make timely decisions.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Powell’s claim about making decisions is valid.

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

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Sophistication (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to contextualize their argument, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (<i>“In a world where . . .”</i> OR <i>“Since the beginning of time . . .”</i>). Only hint at or suggest other arguments (<i>“While some may argue that . . .”</i> OR <i>“Some people say . . .”</i>). Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the argument. 	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 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.	

Sample 3A

We live in a world of demand. We are bombarded with advertisements, information, and opinions - the pressure to "buy this now" or "decide this how" is ever-present and always increasing. In a world of instant gratification, it is important to not only make decisions, but make quality decisions that are independent of what may be popular opinion, because the consequence of a quick decision may be costly.

I just became an adult, and now I'm faced with a plethora of decisions about college, finances, and my future career. Every day, I am reminded of the decisions I have to make and the deadlines I have to decide by. It gets overwhelming. When I was in the process of choosing where I wanted to go to college, there were some people around me that were making decisions within weeks. They would find a college to visit, think about it for a few weeks, and then, bam, they knew. Some people I knew did that with their career as well. Those same people would sit with their decisions for a few months and then the doubts would start to roll in. "What if I made the wrong choice?" The question loomed around in their minds until they shook it away, or, for some, would change the decision that they thought was perfect for them. This was not my case. It took me months, almost a full year, to decide where I wanted to go. I compiled all the information I could, and I would often feel overwhelmed, and even more so like I was the only person still deciding, but in the end, once I made my decision, I was sure of it. I had no doubts. Quality decisions are important. It may be easy to make decisions on the spot and take information right as it comes and base your decisions on that information, but in my experience, waiting despite the pressure pays off. That way, you are sure of your decision and you know it was based on your true desire and not a passing wish. Making decisions that are independent of popular opinion is valuable as well. Personally, I have found this to be true with my political views. I was raised a conservative, but a large portion of my peers were liberal. As I grew and learned more about what each side entailed, I formed my own opinions. My peers had a large influence on me, and so did the media, but I remained independent and sure of my conservative views. Some people will assimilate to the views that those around them have, and that results in a poor foundation that is easily swayed by the fluctuating opinions of that community. When someone like me spends time forming their own opinions apart from others, the result is a solid viewpoint that will not be affected by the present climate or outside opinions.

If a decision is made hastily, though, the cost may be high. Changing your major or transferring schools isn't too difficult, and though there may be disappointment, the cost is not high in the long run. On the other hand, making a hasty decision about a place to live, who to live with, or how to live life comes with a cost. These things are coming up in the future: will I choose to stay and live in the state I live right now? Thought is required to make that decision and if I make it too quickly, I might end up missing out on a great job opportunity or cheaper living costs. If I choose to live with someone I've only known for a few months they may turn out to be a whole different person that I can't just walk out on. Paying bills, cooking inside or eating out, or vacations might be spur of the moment decisions, but making bad habits out of them will come back and bite me in the future.

In a world of demand and instant gratification, it's important not only to make decisions, but make quality decisions that are independent of what may be popular opinion, because the consequence of a quick decision may be costly.

Sample 3B

Colin Powell wrote in his autobiography that timely decisions are more important than quick decisions. He argues that decisions made should not be rash but rather ones that have a fulfilling and maximized effectiveness. I agree with his claim because the effectiveness of making timely decisions and the ineffectiveness of quick decisions is exhibited in the U.S.'s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the tapering of the Federal Reserve's increase of interest rates recently.

When the U.S. became aware of the existence of COVID-19, the government had to make vital decisions for the country. Many of these decisions had to be made quite quickly. A crucial decision was whether or not to implement a vaccine mandate. In its early stages, COVID-19 was having detrimental effects on people's health. The vaccine was still in trial and not yet approved. Genevieve Allard, a teacher at a high school in NJ, had to make a timely decision when her son fell severely ill from COVID-19 and had the opportunity to give him the vaccine. If she had not made the decision to vaccinate him, his recovery could have been compromised. The decision was timely, and thus it saved him.

During COVID-19, the economy needed tremendous support as consumption began to decrease and businesses started to shut down. Conversely, the government passed a stimulus bill that benefited the economy and allowed it to rebound. The recovery of the economy was accelerated by the vaccine's effectiveness. Then, a few months later, the Federal Reserve announced that they would begin to taper the economy off its crutches. However, they did not taper early enough, even though they made that decision. Consequently, the economy started experiencing inflation, which the government is still trying to alleviate today. This delayed action partly led to the inflation Americans are facing today.

To remedy the rampant inflation America was facing, the Central Bank announced that they would raise interest rates. However, when they did so, it was not sufficient as the rate of inflation continued to rise. This may have been because they did not decide to raise it by 50 basis points, or they raised interest rates too late. This emphasizes the importance of making timely decisions and not just quick decisions.

Quick decisions can be impulsive and carry a lot of risk. They may be effective in certain cases, but they should not be prioritized over timely decisions. It is important to time a situation just right in order to maximize the probability that a desired outcome takes place.

Sample 3C

Colin Powell, who was a four-star general and former United States Secretary of State, wrote in his autobiography and made a claim about decision-making. In my personal opinion, Powell's claim is true to its full extent and shows an extremely valuable piece of advice that we often do not consider when making decisions.

Powell stated, "Before we can have every possible fact in hand, we have to decide... but it should be a timely decision" (1995). With this statement, Powell is telling the audience of his autobiography that it does not necessarily matter how many facts you have, and how many things you know. Being able to have access to everything possible takes a great amount of time, and we don't always have all the time in the world. A decision has to be made with what you know, waiting for something else to come in while trying to make a decision, whether that other fact is good or bad. You already have a good amount of things that you know. Everyone's time is valuable, including yours. At the end of the day, the decision will have to be made, and that is why it should be made in a "timely" manner.

Question 3

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

Overview

Students responding to this question were expected to read a quote about making decisions from a 1995 autobiography by Colin Powell and then write an essay that argued their position on the extent to which Powell’s claim about making decisions is valid. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that takes a defensible position; provide evidence to support their line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supports their line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument.

As per the Course and Exam Description, (CLE-1.0, REO 1.0, STL-1.R), students were expected to be able to select evidence to develop and refine their claims, use appropriate approaches of organization and reasoning to support their argument, and make stylistic choices that advance that argument.

Sample: 3A

Score: 1-4-1

Thesis (0–1) points: 1

The thesis takes a nuanced position in paragraph 1 on the extent to which Powell’s claim about making decisions is valid, rather than simply restating it or simply agreeing with it: “It is important to not only make decisions, but make quality decisions that are independent of what may be popular opinion, because the consequence of a quick decision may be costly.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The response uses relevant details about the life choices and political views of the student and the student’s acquaintances to establish evidence and build a line of reasoning in support of a nuanced argument about the pressures to make hasty decisions and the consequences of doing so. The examples of college, finances, and career are all relevant to the argument and effectively situate the reasoning within personal anecdotes and scenarios. The response organizes and supports an argument composed of multiple supporting claims exploring the differences in stakes between different kinds of decisions and the pressures that can motivate rushed decisions. Each point is clearly explained using sufficient evidence from the student’s experiences and observations with full and persuasive commentary, as in “When someone like me spends time forming their own opinions apart from others, the result is a solid view point that will not be affected by the present climate or outside opinions.”

Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The response situates the prompt within a broader context of examples that are pressing for students as they move toward their first decisions as adults. The response places these timely decisions for students within a culture that prefers and even demands immediate gratification and thus shows a more complex understanding of the rhetorical situation, ultimately asserting that “[i]n a world of demand and instant gratification, it is important not only to make decisions, but make quality decisions that are independent of what may be popular opinion, because the consequence of a quick decision may be costly.” Noting the consequences of hasty decisions or decisions made to go along with popular opinion is a more nuanced and sophisticated argument that requires effective examples

Question 3 (continued)

and explanation to support. The style is not particularly vivid or persuasive, often marked by successive simple sentences and minor grammatical errors. These errors do not hinder understanding, but it is the nuanced argument that earned the Row C point here.

Sample: 3B

Score: 1-3-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The defensible thesis is found in paragraph 1: “I agree with his claim because the effectiveness of making timely decisions & ineffectiveness of quick decisions is exhibited in the US’s handling of the COVID-19 Pandemic, tapering of the Fed & increase of interest rates recently.” Although the response does not fully demonstrate an understanding of what “timely” means, this should not be held against the response or factor into the scoring of it, as long as the student’s interpretation or use of the word “timely” in the response is clear.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response uses discussions of reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic and decisions about economic turbulence to provide evidence for its argument about making decisions in an appropriate time span. It develops a line of reasoning in which all examples contribute to an argument about the need to act before it is too late. The response provides specific details with each example that relate to making timely decisions, for example those of the NJ high school teacher (“If she had not made the decision to give [her son] the vaccine, his recovery could be further reduced”), the stimulus bill (“the government passed a stimulus bill that benefitted the economy & allowed it to recover”), and the Central Bank (“This may either have been because they did not decide to raise it by 50 basis points, or they raised interest rates too late”). These details and commentary build the argument and support the response’s line of reasoning. Despite the consistent evidence throughout, there is an inconsistency and superficiality of commentary which prevented the response from earning the full 4 points in Row B.

Sophistication (0–1): 0

The response does not demonstrate success at incorporating sophistication of thought or of written expression, instead taking a structured yet simplistic stance on decision-making. There is not a consistently vivid and/or persuasive style, and the response does not examine a broader context or make a forceful argument.

Sample: 3C

Score: 1-1-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response earned the thesis point for the final sentence of paragraph 1: “In my personal opinion, Powells claim is true to full extent and shows an extremely valuable piece of advice that we do not consider when we make decisions.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

The response summarizes Powell’s claim and provides generalizations that circle back to Powell’s claim. For example, in paragraph 2, the student states: “Powell is telling the audience of his

Question 3 (continued)

autobiography that it does not necessarily matter how many facts you have, and how many things you know.” The little evidence provided in this response is vague and general rather than concrete.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The style is not vivid or persuasive. The response takes a simplistic approach that does not make evident any complexities of thought and does not employ effective rhetorical choices in developing the argument.