

2017 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 3

Suggested time—40 minutes.

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

The passage below is an excerpt from *Empire of Illusion* by Chris Hedges. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you develop a position on Hedges’ argument that “the most essential skill . . . is artifice.” Use appropriate, specific evidence to illustrate and develop your position.

The most essential skill in political theater and a consumer culture is artifice. Political leaders, who use the tools of mass propaganda to create a sense of faux intimacy with citizens, no longer need to be competent, sincere, or honest. They need only to appear to have these qualities. Most of all they need a story, a personal narrative. The reality of the narrative is irrelevant. It can be completely at odds with the facts. The consistency and emotional appeal of the story are paramount. Those who are best at deception succeed. Those who have not mastered the art of entertainment, who fail to create a narrative or do not have one fashioned for them by their handlers, are ignored. They become “unreal.”

An image-based culture communicates through narratives, pictures, and pseudo-drama.

STOP

END OF EXAM

AP English Language and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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2017 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3

General Directions: This scoring guide is designed so that the same performance expectations are applied to all student responses. It will be useful for most of the essays, but if it seems inappropriate for a specific essay, assistance should be sought from the Table Leader. The Table Leader should always be shown books that seem to have no response or that contain responses that seem unrelated to the question. A score of 0 or — should not be assigned without this consultation.

The essay's score should reflect an evaluation of the essay as a whole. Students had only 40 minutes to read and write; the essay, therefore, is not a finished product and should not be judged according to standards appropriate for an out-of-class assignment. The essay should be evaluated as a draft, and students should be rewarded for what they do well. The evaluation should focus on the evidence and explanations that the student uses to support the response; students should not be penalized for taking a particular perspective.

All essays, even those scored 8 or 9, may contain occasional lapses in analysis, prose style, or mechanics. Such features should enter into the holistic evaluation of an essay's overall quality. In no case should a score higher than a 2 be given to an essay with errors in grammar and mechanics that persistently interfere with understanding of meaning.

9 – Essays earning a score of 9 meet the criteria for the score of 8 and, in addition, are especially sophisticated in their argument, thorough in their development, or particularly impressive in their control of language.

8 – Effective

Essays earning a score of 8 **effectively** develop a position on Hedges' argument that "the most essential skill . . . is artifice." The evidence and explanations appropriately and convincingly support the writer's position, and the argument* is especially coherent and well developed. The prose demonstrates a consistent ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing but is not necessarily flawless.

7 – Essays earning a score of 7 meet the criteria for the score of 6 but provide a more complete explanation, more thorough development, or a more mature prose style.

6 – Adequate

Essays earning a score of 6 **adequately** develop a position on Hedges' argument that "the most essential skill . . . is artifice." The evidence and explanations appropriately and sufficiently support the writer's position, and the argument is coherent and adequately developed. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.

5 – Essays earning a score of 5 develop a position on Hedges' argument that "the most essential skill . . . is artifice." The evidence and explanations used to support that position may be uneven, inconsistent, or limited. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but it usually conveys the writer's ideas.

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2017 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3 (continued)

4 – Inadequate

Essays earning a score of 4 **inadequately** develop a position on Hedges' argument that "the most essential skill . . . is artifice." The evidence and explanations used may inappropriately, insufficiently, or unconvincingly support the writer's position. The argument may have lapses in coherence or be inadequately developed. The prose generally conveys the student's ideas but may be inconsistent in controlling the elements of effective writing.

3 – Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for the score of 4 but demonstrate less success in developing a position on Hedges' argument that "the most essential skill . . . is artifice." The essays may show less maturity in their control of writing.

2 – Little Success

Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate **little success** in developing a position on Hedges' argument that "the most essential skill . . . is artifice." The student may misunderstand the prompt or substitute a simpler task by responding to the prompt tangentially with unrelated or inaccurate explanation. The prose often demonstrates consistent weaknesses in writing, such as grammatical problems, a lack of development or organization, or a lack of coherence and control.

1 – Essays earning a score of 1 meet the criteria for the score of 2 but are undeveloped, especially simplistic in their explanation and argument, weak in their control of language, or especially lacking in coherence and development.

0 – Indicates an off-topic response, one that merely repeats the prompt, an entirely crossed-out response, a drawing, or a response in a language other than English.

— Indicates an entirely blank response.

* For the purposes of scoring, argument means asserting a claim justified by evidence and/or reasoning.

Sample 3A

Although many may argue that a nation's leaders must be held to a morally superior standard and use only honesty and candor in their pursuits, the Machiavellian nature of politicians, the attempt for politicians to seem more ordinary, and the regular attempts to hide scandals prove that artifice is essential on the road to political office. Individuals must employ artifice and create ideal egos in order for society to accept them as trustworthy and similar to the common man.

Throughout history, rulers have utilized countless different methods of achieving power, however, none have been so successful as the mastering of the art of lying. In his advice to future rulers, Niccolò Machiavelli encourages them to lie and maintain the illusion of sympathy to the common struggles in order to retain power. He asserts that it is imperative for a ruler to appear caring and sympathetic even if his only objective is power. Machiavelli argues that to be sincere and honest is akin to being vulnerable. A ruler must be skilled in the art of deception if he is not to fall prey to usurpers. Thus, it is essential that he appear humble and morally upright to his constituents as he is to appear idealistic, despite his nature being identical to his fellow citizens.

Many popular politicians employ this illusion of modesty in the modern age. Barack Obama, a favorite among many in the nation, was the first sitting President to even appear on a talk show. Despite his many addresses to the nation, his appearance on a talk show enabled him to win the hearts of millions as he was shown to be humble, ordinary, and accessible. This played an enormous role in him winning the trust of the American people and securing a second term. Similarly, Bill Clinton was the first Presidential candidate to appear on a talk show, allowing him to easily reach the public and assert his ideas, winning him the Presidency. Therefore, the appearance of modesty and accessibility plays an enormous role in a politician's chance of success.

The recent election was extremely polarizing as the American people were presented with two of the most radical candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Throughout 2016, each campaign cycle was gripped with scandals from both sides, scandals that the two parties had attempted to hide. However, despite almost daily accusations against Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton's issue with the deleted emails ultimately resulted in her loss. The truth of the matter is, all politicians have secrets and scandals, but the difference between those who succeed and those who don't is the skill to cover them up. Hillary Clinton was not well-versed in the art of deception, though she tried countless times. Whenever she attempted to cover up a scandal, it was faltering and forever painted her as untrustworthy and deceitful, despite the innumerable scandals against Donald Trump as well, resulting in her ultimate loss of the presidency. Thus, a politician cannot simply lie but must be skilled in that art; he must be willing to go to extreme measures to cover up scandals because ultimately, they will be discovered.

Thus, despite the moral superiority we ascribe to politicians and leaders, it is essential for them to employ artifice as demonstrated by Machiavelli, Barack Obama, and the recent Presidential candidates. For, only then can they win over a nation's trust and hopes, if they are considered better but act humble.

Sample 3B

The American people love a good story, whether it be true or not. If a politician can weave a good story that tugs on people's heartstrings, they are practically guaranteed a win. Which is why Chris Hedges' argument that "the most essential skill... is artifice" is true.

To use a recent example, in last year's presidential election, Donald Trump gathered mass support by proclaiming that he was not the typical politician. He was a "man of the people," a homegrown American that just wanted to make America great again. He used the old Reagan campaign slogan to create an even bigger name for himself and get enough support to carry him into the White House. People connected to him because of his practically non-existent political ties and believed in his message and direction for our country. Finally, there was someone the everyday person could relate to and trust enough to let him lead them.

Evidence of using artifice isn't just found in elections, but also in literature. In the book "The Hunger Games," the two main characters of Katniss and Peeta create a story to foster compassion for them in the hopes that it would help them both make it out of the Hunger Games alive. The plan works, and they are sent medicine and other help throughout the games, making it out in the end both alive. They made their audience believe they were in love, angering the game makers while drawing sympathy from the crowds of people that watch the games. In the next book "Catching Fire," they take it even further by implying that Katniss is pregnant, again using a false story to reach their desired outcome. People believed it, of course, and it worked to their advantage.

Politics has always been known as a platform for lies and storytelling. Yet, people believe those lies and revel in the ingenuity of their storytelling, always hoping that their lies are actually truths and their stories more fact than fiction. They choose to give politicians the benefit of the doubt and believe it if it sounds good, or right, or whatever they want to believe. Because Americans have always been a sucker for a pretty face and a good story.

Sample 3C

Most Americans would agree that politicians lie to get into office, which is a prime example that the essential skills are artificial. Politicians will say almost anything to get into office, whether it be creating a wall or breaking the glass ceiling. People have come to expect this, making it a part of our culture in America.

Another example would be actors on red carpets or at interviews. They sound content and relatable, but in reality, they could be selfish people who don't care about anyone. To the public, they act charming, honest, and sincere. They do that so they can get famous and rich. They do that so they will never get ignored.

Personally, we have all done this. We make up fake stories to impress someone, or we overcompensate on a job application. Why do we do this? We do this to get a job or a raise. We do this to get a date or a new friend. We do this to get ahead in life, to make sure we are always better than the person beside us. All these examples show us how our essential skills are artificial. In the end, we all lie or pretend to have a skill that we don't have. Sure, there are people who would never lie, but look around. Humans started lying since the start with Adam and Eve, which leaves the thought that all our skills are fake.

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2017 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 3

Overview

Question 3, the argument question, like the other two questions, asked students to take a position on an issue that the question presents. This question provided less supplementary material than did the other two questions, and it relied on students' knowledge of the world to provide support for the claims that the students made. In other words, students did not need to cite or analyze other writers' works. Question 3 did, however, intend to see how well students can use logical explanations and evidence of facts or events to support their claims. This year's Question 3 asked students to develop a position on Chris Hedges' claim that "the most essential skill . . . is artifice." The question included an extended and complex excerpt from Hedges' book *The Empire of Illusion*. Focusing on the arenas of "political theater" and "consumer culture," Hedges asserts the power of artificial "personal narrative" and "emotional appeal" as tools of persuasion. Hedges' rich and evocative language served as a springboard for many essays: students seized, for example, on his assertion that "mass propaganda [can] create a sense of faux intimacy"; likewise, many students took their lead from the concluding line of the passage, where Hedges maintains that an "image-based culture communicates through narratives, pictures, and pseudo-drama."

Sample: 3A Score: 8

This essay effectively develops a position on Hedges' argument. It presents an effective claim that politicians "must employ artifice and create ideal egos in order for society to accept them as trustworthy and similar to the common man." The body paragraphs appropriately and convincingly support the argument, with evidence ranging from Machiavelli to contemporary politics (e.g., Barack Obama's and Bill Clinton's talk-show appearances and the recent presidential election). In the second paragraph the essay's discussion of Machiavelli's advice "to appear caring and sympathetic even if [a politician] has no objective but power" is especially coherent and the explanation well-developed as an example of artifice. The third paragraph transitions effectively to "the modern age," explaining how Obama's and Clinton's talk-show appearances gave each "the appearance of modesty and accessibility" that enabled their respective elections to the presidency. The fourth paragraph, on political scandals that beset both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign, effectively argues that Trump's superior skill at artifice is what carried him to victory: "Thus, a politician cannot simply lie but must be skilled in that art." The essay is especially coherent due to its clear organizational structure and transitions and due to development through evidence that clearly connects artifice to political success. Although it contains a few syntactical flaws, the prose exhibits a consistent ability to control the elements of writing.

Sample: 3B Score: 6

This essay adequately argues a position on Hedges' argument, focusing on false personal narratives as examples of artifice. The essay presents two adequately developed pieces of evidence (Donald Trump's "man of the people" persona during his 2016 presidential campaign and the false love story contrived by Katniss and Peeta in *The Hunger Games*) that sufficiently support the student's position. The essay's discussion of Trump in the second paragraph ("People . . . believed in his message and direction for our country") is adequate but not quite thoroughly developed enough to be fully effective. In the third paragraph the discussion of *The Hunger Games* produces sufficient explanation ("They made their audience believe they were in love . . . drawing sympathy from the crowds") but is not as thorough as those found in 8-level essays: "People believed it, of course, and it worked to their advantage." The essay's straightforward and coherent organization (introduction, two body paragraphs, conclusion) allows for an adequate, but not fully effective, level of development. The prose contains some lapses, but it is generally clear.

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Question 3 (continued)

Sample: 3C

Score: 2

This essay demonstrates little success in developing a position on Hedges' argument, as it addresses lying rather than artifice: "Most Americans would agree the politicians [*sic*] lie to get into office." The second and third paragraphs substitute a simpler task by discussing, respectively, "actors on red carpets" and "fake stories to impress some one, or . . . on a job application." While these examples might be interpreted to be a discussion of artifice, the statements in the last paragraph make clear that the student is misunderstanding the prompt: "All this [*sic*] examples show us how are [*sic*] essential skills are artificial. In the end we all lie or pretend to have a skill that we don't have." Overall, the essay demonstrates a lack of development stemming from its initial misunderstanding of the prompt. The prose also demonstrates consistent weakness in the control of language.