

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the following letter, Abigail Adams (1744–1818) writes to her son John Quincy Adams, who is traveling abroad with his father, John Adams, a United States diplomat and later the country's second president. Read the letter carefully. Then, in a well-developed essay, analyze the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son. Support your analysis with specific references to the text.

12 January, 1780.

MY DEAR SON,

I hope you have had no occasion, either from enemies or the dangers of the sea, to repent your second voyage to France. If I had thought your reluctance arose from proper deliberation, or that you were capable of judging what was most for your own benefit, I should not have urged you to accompany your father and brother when you appeared so averse to the voyage.

You, however, readily submitted to my advice, and, I hope, will never have occasion yourself, nor give me reason, to lament it. Your knowledge of the language must give you greater advantages now than you could possibly have reaped whilst ignorant of it; and as you increase in years, you will find your understanding opening and daily improving.

Some author, that I have met with, compares a judicious traveller to a river, that increases its stream the further it flows from its source; or to certain springs, which, running through rich veins of minerals, improve their qualities as they pass along. It will be expected of you, my son, that, as you are favored with superior advantages under the instructive eye of a tender parent, your improvement should bear some proportion to your advantages. Nothing is wanting with you but attention, diligence, and steady application. Nature has not been deficient.

These are times in which a genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed. Would Cicero have shone so distinguished an orator if he had not been roused, kindled, and inflamed by the

tyranny of Catiline, Verres, and Mark Anthony? The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties. All history will convince you of this, and that wisdom and penetration are the fruit of experience, not the lessons of retirement and leisure. Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities, which would otherwise lie dormant, wake into life and form the character of the hero and the statesman. War, tyranny, and desolation are the scourges of the Almighty, and ought no doubt to be deprecated. Yet it is your lot, my son, to be an eyewitness of these calamities in your own native land, and, at the same time, to owe your existence among a people who have made a glorious defence of their invaded liberties, and who, aided by a generous and powerful ally, with the blessing of Heaven, will transmit this inheritance to ages yet unborn.

Nor ought it to be one of the least of your incitements towards exerting every power and faculty of your mind, that you have a parent who has taken so large and active a share in this contest, and discharged the trust reposed in him with so much satisfaction as to be honored with the important embassy which at present calls him abroad.

The strict and inviolable regard you have ever paid to truth, gives me pleasing hopes that you will not swerve from her dictates, but add justice, fortitude, and every manly virtue which can adorn a good citizen, do honor to your country, and render your parents supremely happy, particularly your ever affectionate mother,

A. A.

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2014 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 2

The essay score should reflect the essay's quality as a whole. Remember that students had only 40 minutes to read and write; the essay, therefore, is not a finished product and should not be judged by standards appropriate for an out-of-class assignment. Evaluate the essay as a draft, making certain to reward students for what they do well.

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

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 impressive in their control of language.

8 – Effective

Essays earning a score of 8 **effectively** analyze the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son. They develop their analysis* with evidence and explanations that are appropriate and convincing, referring to the passage explicitly or implicitly. 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 more complete explanation, more thorough development, or a more mature prose style.

6 – Adequate

Essays earning a score of 6 **adequately** analyze the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son. They develop their analysis with evidence and explanations that are appropriate and sufficient, referring to the passage explicitly or implicitly. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.

5 – Essays earning a score of 5 analyze the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son. The evidence or explanations used may be uneven, inconsistent, or limited. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but it usually conveys the writer's ideas.

4 – Inadequate

Essays earning a score of 4 **inadequately** analyze the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son. These essays may misunderstand the passage, misrepresent the strategies Adams uses, or may analyze these strategies insufficiently. The evidence or explanations used may be inappropriate, insufficient, or unconvincing. The prose generally conveys the writer'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 analyzing the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son. They are less perceptive in their understanding of the passage or Adams's strategies, or the explanations or examples may be particularly limited or simplistic. The essays may show less maturity in control of writing.

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2014 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 2 (continued)

2 – Little Success

Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate **little success** in analyzing the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son. These essays may misunderstand the prompt, misread the passage, fail to analyze the strategies Adams uses, or substitute a simpler task by responding to the prompt tangentially with unrelated, inaccurate, or inappropriate explanation. The prose often demonstrates consistent weaknesses in writing, such as grammatical problems, a lack of development or organization, or a lack of control.

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

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, analysis means explaining the rhetorical choices an author makes in an attempt to achieve a particular effect or purpose.

Sample 2A

In 1780, eight years before the ratification of the Constitution, Abigail Adams wrote to her son John Quincy Adams, the future President of the United States, while he was traveling overseas with his father, who was serving as a U.S. diplomat before his election as President. Unaware that her son would become President, she writes to convince him of the value of travel and diligence. Adams uses ethos, flattery, a concerned maternal tone, historical allusions, backhanded compliments, patriotic appeals, and lists to impart the importance of maximizing natural talent by applying oneself.

Adams encourages her son to be diligent by appealing to his affection and flattering him in the first half of her letter. She opens the letter with "My dear son" to establish that she does not intend to scold him but to guide him. Her first concern is his safety, appealing to his emotions so that he will be receptive to her advice, complementing his language skills while qualifying her compliment by asserting his need to improve. Her reference to a discussion with an author legitimizes her argument as employing the "older and wiser" claim. Her reference to the author's metaphor intends to assure her son of the importance of the trip on which she encouraged him to embark. She again flatters him by emphasizing his vast natural talent but qualifies the assertion by highlighting the necessity of employing his God-given gifts through showing effort. She instills a sense of guilt in him for not capitalizing on his blessings, hoping that he will become more diligent and mature.

In the second half of the letter, Adams employs historical allusions and invokes a sense of patriotism to instill a sense of responsibility in her son. In line 27, she implies that he is a genius like Cicero, proceeding to allude to his writings about the "tyranny of Catiline, Verres, and Marc Antony." The compliment flatters him while the historical allusion provides examples to legitimize her point that "the habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties" (lines 32-34). The present difficulties to which she refers involve the American Revolution from Great Britain and the birth of a new nation. Adams invokes patriotism to call her son to action and out of his current lethargic state by listing "war, tyranny, and desolation" (line 41) experienced by the country. She encourages her son to conduct his life aiding the country from the aforementioned ills, which are the "scourges of the Almighty" (line 42). By invoking God's name, she intensifies the need for her son to change himself so that he can shape the future of the nation. Additionally, Adams implies that, as his mother, she has invested her life in him, and by disregarding her advice, he will prove her life a waste and a failure. She manipulates by evoking guilt once again. She closes the letter with a strong maternal tone, stating her hope that he will become more diligent not only for his country but also for his parents, motivating him through patriotism and maternal love.

Abigail Adams wrote this letter in a very uncertain time in American history. She was unaware not only that her husband and son would one day become President but also that the office of President would even exist. She wrote to her son in desperate hope that by raising him well, she could ensure a bright future for her beloved homeland.

Sample 2B

In 1780, while her son John Quincy Adams was traveling abroad with his father, Abigail Adams wrote a letter advising and convincing him to seize every opportunity presented to him. As Adams' father and husband was a United States Diplomat, she wanted the younger Adams to appreciate the chances he had been given and use them to improve himself as a man and thinker. She conveys this advice through the use of pathos, classical rhetoric such as ethos, logos, and pathos, as well as figurative language like metaphors and imagery.

The diction in the letter suggests Adams compelled her son to join the voyage. She starts by asserting her credibility: "If I had thought your reluctance arose from proper deliberation... I should not have urged you to accompany your father and brother." As his mother, she believed she knew what was best for him. Furthermore, she consistently cites the authority of the elder John Adams as a teacher to encourage the younger John to listen. Adams writes, "You have a parent... honored with the important embassy which at present calls him abroad," using circumlocution to indirectly show John the importance of listening to his father.

Additionally, the use of pathos and logos in the letter is evident. The tone shifts from serious to sensitive, indicating that while Adams is being formal, she still cares deeply. The emotional appeal is evident in phrases like "render your parents supremely happy, particularly your ever affectionate mother." The logos can be seen through the historical example of Cicero, providing the argument with historical context. She further elaborates by stating that "all history will convince you of this, and that wisdom and penetration are the fruits of experience."

Adams also stirs additional emotions in her son with statements like "These are times in which a genius would wish to live." She wants to excite him, but the tone is slightly condescending. The use of figurative language is also apparent. Adams first employs a metaphor involving a river, which complements the context of his voyage and symbolizes potential and strength. Later, she transitions to descriptions of "war, tyranny, and desolation." Though not extensively described, these powerful words evoke strong images, urging John to listen and take responsibility.

There was no single rhetorical strategy that fully encapsulated Abigail Adams' letter. Instead, by subtly using a combination of many, her message was powerfully conveyed. Of these, ethos, pathos, logos, metaphors, and imagery were the most significant in portraying the idea that her son needed to take advantage of the voyage for both himself and his country.

Sample 2C

In Abigail Adams' letter to her son John Quincy Adams, she employs a variety of rhetorical devices to convey her advice, including pathos, repetition, and diction.

Throughout the letter, Adams utilizes a soft, motherly tone, effectively employing pathos (emotion) to connect with her son. This familiar emotional appeal resonates with her son, as he grew up with this maternal influence. For instance, in lines 61-63, Abigail Adams states, "do honor to your country... your ever affectionate mother." This seems crafted to induce a sense of guilt in her son, subtly suggesting that he has a duty to accomplish something significant.

In lines 21 and 43, Abigail Adams repeatedly uses the phrase "my son." This repetition serves to remind him that the writer is his mother, whom he was likely raised to obey. Without this repetition, the letter might come across as a formal or business-like correspondence, prompting him to deliberate on his choices independently. However, the repetition of "my son" brings a personal, familial dimension, compelling him to consider not just what he wants, but also what his mother desires for him.

The diction throughout the letter indicates that Abigail Adams is well-informed and articulate. A detailed and sophisticated choice of words likely encourages John Quincy Adams to pay closer attention to the message. Additionally, the use of rhetorical questions, like the one in lines 30-32 ("Would Cicero have shone... against Verres and Mark Antony?"), prompts the reader (John Quincy Adams) to pause and reflect on their own response.

As evident, Abigail Adams' letter to her son effectively incorporates multiple rhetorical devices, such as pathos, repetition, diction, and rhetorical questioning. These techniques enhance the persuasiveness of her advice and demonstrate the nuanced ways in which rhetoric can be employed to influence someone, like John Quincy Adams.

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2014 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 2

Overview

Question 2 presented students with a short letter written by Abigail Adams in 1810 to her son, John Quincy Adams, who, at his parents' urging, had accompanied his father on a diplomatic trip to France. Students were directed to read the letter carefully and then write an essay analyzing "the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son." Finally, students were directed to support their analysis with specific references to the text. The intent of this question was to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their close reading skills (applied to a pre-20th-century text), to discern Abigail Adams' rhetorical purposes, and to explain how she used written language on a particular occasion in an effort to accomplish those purposes. The choice of the term "rhetorical strategies" rather than "rhetorical devices" was intended to emphasize the priority of *function over form* in rhetorical analysis. The prompt was meant to guide students away from "figure hunting" (i.e., identifying metaphors, assonance, synecdoche, etc.) and toward an account of how Adams intended her letter to function as a means of convincing her son to assume the perspective and embark upon the course of action she was urging him to take. Part of the rhetorical analysis task is constructing the rhetorical context in which language performs its function. In this case, students were helped to construct the context by the date of the letter and by a brief account in the prompt of both the writer and recipient of the letter and the historical moment in which the letter was written. Students could also draw upon their own historical knowledge or understanding of family relationships or class values to supplement this sketch of the context. In requiring students to refer specifically to the text, the prompt invited students to demonstrate their abilities to select and use appropriate textual evidence to illustrate and support the assertions they made about Adams' rhetorical strategies.

Sample: 2A

Score: 8

This essay effectively analyzes the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son, beginning with a review of the historical context: "Unaware that her son would become President, she writes to convince her son of travel and of diligence." The writer connects the strategies to Adams' purpose, which is described in detail: "Adams employs a concerned, maternal tone, historical allusions, qualified flattery, patriotic appeals, and lists to impart the importance of maximizing on natural talent by applying oneself." The essay demonstrates a controlled use of language to develop the argument, explaining not simply that Adams appeals to her son's emotions, but that she "instills a sense of guilt" and "invokes a sense of patriotism to call her son to action." The essay ends with another reference to the historical context and a larger view of Adams' purpose: the "desperate hope that by raising him well, she could ensure a bright future for her beloved homeland." For its thorough development and ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing, this essay earned a score of 8.

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
2014 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 2 (continued)

Sample: 2B

Score: 6

The essay adequately analyzes the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son, identifying the overall purpose of Adams' letter: "[S]he wanted the younger Adams to appreciate the chances he had been given and use them to make himself a better man and thinker." The essay connects this purpose with strategies Adams uses: "classical rhetorics such as ethos, pathos, and logos, as well as . . . metaphors and imagery." The student accurately analyzes the strategies, providing a sufficient explanation of tonal shifts and appeals to emotion: "The tonal shift from serious to sensitive . . . is a way for Abigail Adams to show her son that while she is being formal, she still cares." The essay then moves into a discussion of the resulting emotions, concluding that Adams "incites additional emotions in him with philosophical sayings." The essay earned a score of 6 for its adequate explanation and its generally clear prose.

Sample: 2C

Score: 3

This essay inadequately analyzes the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son. It attempts to set up an argument and identifies three strategies that Adams' letter uses: "pathos, repetition [*sic*], and diction," but it inadequately analyzes them and fails to explain how they are linked to the author's rhetorical purpose. The essay's explanations are especially simplistic and limited, asserting that Adams uses pathos "to make her son feel some type of guilt," and that "[b]ecause of the diction, John Quincy Adams will pay more attention to what he's reading." The essay is less perceptive in its understanding of Adams's strategies and its prose shows less maturity in control of writing than an essay earning a score of 4.