

2016 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.)

In 1891, Irish author Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) observed, “Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man’s original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion.”

Wilde claims that disobedience is a valuable human trait and that it promotes social progress. Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Wilde’s claims are valid. Use appropriate examples from your reading, experience, or observations to support your argument.

STOP

END OF EXAM

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Question 3

The essay's 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 your holistic evaluation of an essay's overall quality. In no case should you give a score higher than a 2 to an essay with errors in grammar and mechanics that persistently interfere with your 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** argue a position on the extent to which Wilde's claims are valid. The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and convincing, 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** argue a position on the extent to which Wilde's claims are valid. The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and sufficient, 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 argue a position on the extent to which Wilde's claims are valid. 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 student's ideas.

4 – Inadequate

Essays earning a score of 4 **inadequately** argue a position on the extent to which Wilde's claims are valid. The evidence or explanations used may be inappropriate, insufficient, or unconvincing. 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 arguing a position on the extent to which Wilde's claims are valid. The essays may show less maturity in their control of writing.

AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION 2016 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3 (continued)

2 – Little Success

Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate **little success** in arguing a position on the extent to which Wilde’s claims are valid. The student may misunderstand the prompt 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 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

Newton's first law states that an object at rest will stay at rest while an object in motion will stay in motion unless acted upon by a force. The last part of that is crucial; only by applying a force will the motion of an object change. In a similar vein, it is through disobedience and rebellion that social progress can be made.

The earliest example of American disobedience is the Stamp Act Congress. The American people were furious with the British for enacting the Stamp Act. This was the first direct tax on the colonies after a period of Salutary Neglect. The tax itself was not that big of a deal, rather it was the act of taxing that got everyone mad. They declared "No taxation without representation" and got the Stamp Act repealed (only to have the British issue the Declaratory Act in response). However, it was with disobedience that the British decided to repeal the Stamp Act. Otherwise, it would have set a precedent for the British to directly tax the colonies like the mainland British people. Eventually, the colonists were fed up with being colonists and had another act of disobedience: the American Revolution. With their surprising victory, America became free of Britain and was able to start self-governing. Had the people not rebelled, there would be many unhappy British colonists with their rights denied to them. Because they employed tactics of disobedience, they were able to achieve exactly what they wanted.

Another example further down American history was the fight for civil rights. This includes the notable Montgomery Bus Boycotts and Freedom Riders and diner sit-ins. Both were examples of civil disobedience. For the Montgomery Bus Boycott, black people in Montgomery, Alabama did not ride the bus until they were promised equal sitting rights. For the Freedom Riders, they assisted in the diner sit-ins. They would sit in diners and wait to be served. Many would not be served because it was an all-white diner, and this would take up space for other restaurant-goers. Both of these were potent methods of disobedience, and have come a long way; there is no segregated seating on buses, or in restaurants. Although they seem like small steps, their efforts were part of a larger effort to get America to realize that segregation was wrong. Because they did, we no longer live in a segregated society. We have progressed greatly in terms of recognizing the equality of various people. If we had waited, nothing would have happened. The uncomfortable racism in the country would not have been dealt with and instead be treated as a fact of life.

More recent examples of civil disobedience include the Yellow Umbrella Rebellion in Hong Kong and the Black Lives Matter campaign in the U.S. The Yellow Umbrella Rebellion was a protest against China selecting candidates for office in Hong Kong. Under an agreement with the British in the handover of Hong Kong to China, they agreed to the "one country, two systems" policy. This allowed Hong Kong to keep its democratic nature until a certain point, when it would be fully acclimated to China. Because of this, China has slowly eroded Hong Kong's rights, the most recent being fixing their elections to have China-friendly politicians winning only. The Yellow Umbrella Rebellion helped bring international attention to the issues that Hong Kong faced. Had they not done something, Hong Kong would slowly suffer suffocation from China. This is similar to America fighting for its rights from Britain, and ultimately winning. In the Black Lives Matter campaign, Americans are raising awareness of the racism still present in the country. Much like the civil rights movement of earlier, BLM uses mass media to thrust into people's faces the uncomfortable and ugly truth of racism against black people. This includes using protests, social media, and more. Both of these are examples of disobedience for social progress. Both groups feel like their rights are being denied. There is no quiet way to attempt to reclaim your rights. The process is long and daunting, but can only be catalyzed by acts of disobedience. Although both are still ongoing acts of disobedience, they have already started a dialogue about what the right thing to do is.

Disobedience is the event separating the way things were and the way things will be. For people to realize there is a problem, the problem must be brought to their attention. Once the problem has been identified, the only way to change things is to actively change them via rebellion or legislation. Disobedience is the key to social change.

Sample 3B

According to Oscar Wilde, disobedience is man's greatest virtue. Through disobedience, he claims, progress was born. Looking back on history, there is clearly truth to Wilde's assertion. In society, disobedience promotes the questioning of societal norms, historical change, and progressive thought.

Wilde was not the only person who saw the intrinsic value of disobedience. Henry David Thoreau, a prominent transcendentalist writer, crafted an entire essay and life plan on the principles of civil disobedience. Thoreau quickly developed his ideas regarding society and his disdain for conformity. These thoughts soon led to actions as he spent time in jail for not paying his taxes. This form of civil disobedience was his way of challenging societal norms and prompting others to do the same.

Transcendentalist thought became wildly popular, and I have read both Thoreau's and Emerson's works in school because they have left a lasting imprint on modern philosophy.

Hints of Thoreau's civil disobedience can be seen throughout the 20th century. His ideas led to the most pivotal historical changes in the Civil Rights movement. Leading figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks urged African Americans to spark social and political change through acts of civil disobedience. They staged sit-ins, marches, and peaceful protests all in the hopes of obtaining the civil rights they deserved. Their success is evident in the many social and legislative changes that followed the Civil Rights Movement, one of the most notable being the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I learned about all this and more during my 5th-grade field trip to the Civil Rights Museum, where I purchased a t-shirt with the quote: "Well-behaved women seldom make history." Again, the idea of disobedience as a driver for historical change is clear.

Once historical changes have been made by acts of disobedience, progressive thought is also enhanced. Right now, Bernie Sanders is hanging on for dear life in the 2016 Presidential Election. Although called a socialist by many, his radical philosophies have continued to garner the support of countless youths and adults alike. At this point, though, it is not likely he will win against Hillary in the Democratic Primaries. Despite this setback, Bernie's political thought has raised new questions about what the future holds for American politics. His views are decidedly anti-establishment, which harkens back to the non-conformist ideas of the transcendentalists. Bernie himself was even a supporter of Martin Luther King, Jr., as evidenced by a photograph of him at one of his rallies. Even if Bernie does not win the Democratic nomination, the strength of his progressive ideas that were influenced by disobedience have a great chance of shaping the future of American society.

Oscar Wilde's idea that disobedience is what drives progress is clearly an accurate one. Disobedience has led to people questioning society, causing historical change, and thinking progressive ideas. After all, "We are the music makers, and we are the dreamers of dreams."

sample 3C

Oscar Wilde once observed, "Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion." History has shown that different forms of rebellion resulted in the basic human rights we have today. It's also seen in modern day where people are currently making history and breaking the norms of society. Without disobedience, society would never progress as a whole.

The satirical "Animal Farm" by George Orwell exemplifies the use of rebellion to overthrow corrupt communist leaders. In the novel, the characters first accept their reality under these leaders. They slowly realize the unfair treatment they are put under and rebel against the leaders, eventually overthrowing them. This novel is also an analogy to the Soviet Union and communism under Joseph Stalin. The experiences of the characters in the novel and the people from the Soviet Union caused them to disobey their leaders. They were able to have their own consciousness and reject the lies their leaders were feeding them.

One of the important causes of rebellion is the ability to think clearly about a situation. Without disobedience, being a human with a critical thinking process would be of no use. Instead, they use disobedience for change to happen. They don't sit around and wait until they get what they want, which would be a waste of their abilities.

Rebellion comes in different forms and it does promote social progress. We wouldn't be the people who we are today without the disobedience from our ancestors. The knowledge we obtained resulted from the change after the struggling experiences of many people in the past.

AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2016 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 3

Overview

The “Argument Question” asked students to utilize their knowledge of the world as well as their personal experiences and observations to support a claim in response to a given question. This year’s “Argument Question” first provided a quote from 19th-century Irish author Oscar Wilde asserting the socially progressive function of disobedience before asking students to take a “position on the extent to which Wilde’s claims are valid.” The phasing of the question avoided prompting students to binary responses — arguing that Wilde is “right” or “wrong” — but instead encouraged students to develop a more nuanced position on Wilde’s claim.

While it does not provide sources as does the “Synthesis Question,” the “Argument Question” also demands support for the claims made by students, support that is carefully discussed so that the essay’s audience will understand the reasoning behind it. In other words, this question is asking students to use rhetorical strategies to convince their audience that their claim is valid. These strategies include considering the students’ own ethos (How do the students show they know what they are discussing? How do the students show they share the same values as the audience? How do they illustrate that the argument will benefit the audience), logos (Is the support acceptable to the audience? Is the support relevant to the claim? Is the support sufficient for the audience and the situation?), and pathos (Do the students align the audience with themselves? Do they alienate the audience? Do they move the audience with the support?).

Sample: 3A

Score: 8

This essay effectively argues a position on the extent to which Wilde’s claims are valid. Using an analogy between physics and politics to support the claim that “it is through disobedience and rebellion that social progress can be made,” the student proceeds to substantiate this claim with appropriate and convincing evidence and explanations. In the first paragraph, the essay’s discussion of the Stamp Act Congress and the subsequent American Revolution is especially coherent and includes consideration of potential consequences had this form of disobedience not occurred. The essay’s focus moves to the civil rights movement in the third paragraph. Discussing the “Montgomery Bus Strikes and Freedom Riders,” the student offers an insightful comment: “Although they seem like small steps, these efforts were part of a larger effort to get America to realize that segregation was wrong.” In the fourth paragraph, the student presents two more appropriate examples (the Yellow Umbrella Rebellion and the Black Lives Matter movement) and follows with well-developed explanations. Characterized by its clear organizational structure and smooth transitions, the essay provides convincing evidence that connects disobedience to the advancement of social progress. Although it contains a few syntactical flaws, the essay demonstrates a consistent ability to control the elements of effective writing.

Sample: 3B

Score: 6

This essay adequately argues a position on the extent to which Wilde’s claims are valid. Observing that “disobedience promotes the questioning of societal norms, historical change, and progressive thought,” the essay presents three adequately developed pieces of evidence surrounding Henry David Thoreau, the civil rights movement, and the 2016 presidential election that are sufficiently connected to the claim. In the second paragraph, the essay’s discussion of Thoreau yields adequate commentary about “his way of challenging societal norms” and, in the third paragraph, its treatment of the civil rights movement produces some sufficient explanation (“Their success is evident in the many social and legislative changes that

AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2016 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 3 (continued)

followed the Civil Rights Movement, one of the most notable being the Civil Rights Act of 1964"). The student then moves to the current election cycle, and the essay's treatment of Bernie Sanders ends with an adequate comment regarding the impact of his disobedience ("the strength of his progressive ideas that were influenced by disobedience have a great chance of shaping the future of American society"). While the prose contains some lapses, it is generally clear. For its appropriate evidence, adequately developed argument, and clear prose, the essay was scored a 6.

Sample: 3C

Score: 4

This essay inadequately argues a position on the extent to which Wilde's claims are valid. While the single piece of evidence presented (*Animal Farm*) has the potential to provide adequate support for the argument, the essay's explanation of how the evidence helps to develop the position remains insufficient: the connection between the animals overthrowing their leaders and the idea of progress is vague. Likewise, the attempt at analogy (between *Animal Farm* and the Soviet Union) does little to further the argument. In the third paragraph, the essay's attempt at a more philosophical approach ("One of the important causes of rebellion is the ability to think clearly") is unconvincing and inappropriate. The prose generally conveys the student's ideas, but is inconsistent in controlling the elements of effective writing.