

## **2015 AP<sup>®</sup> 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.)

An anthropologist studying first-year students at a university in the United States writes that friendly phrases like “How are you?,” “Nice to meet you,” and “Let’s get in touch” communicate politeness rather than literal intent. What, if anything, is the value or function of such polite speech?

In a well-written essay, develop your position on the value or function of polite speech in a culture or community with which you are familiar. Use appropriate evidence from your reading, experience, or observations to support your argument.

**STOP**

**END OF EXAM**

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## 2015 SCORING GUIDELINES

### 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 a paper with errors in grammar and mechanics that persistently interfere with your understanding of meaning.

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**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 the value or function of polite speech in a culture or community with which the student is familiar. 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** develop a position on the value or function of polite speech in a culture or community with which the student is familiar. 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 develop a position on the value or function of polite speech in a culture or community with which the student is familiar. 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** develop a position on the value or function of polite speech in a culture or community with which the student is familiar. 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 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 developing a position on the value or function of polite speech in a culture or community with which the student is familiar. The essays may show less maturity in their control of writing.

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## 2015 SCORING GUIDELINES

### Question 3 (continued)

#### 2 – Little Success

Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate **little success** in developing a position on the value or function of polite speech in a culture or community with which the student is familiar. 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

Being polite is considered an unspoken edict in order to be accepted in our first world culture that relies on societal niceties in order to function. Those part of such a community use polite speech to faintly imply intent, but as the anthropologist concluded, these phrases are used to communicate politeness rather than the literal meaning of the sentences. This is because although these are unnecessary in accomplishing whatever one sets out to do directly, they are the trappings that make others more receptive to one's own purpose, whether they are superiors, peers, juries, or even the general public. Polite speech is what enables those who use it to obtain what they want in a society free from pressures other than the simple desire to do something. Polite speech lends respectability to proceedings.

For example, polite speech is an expectation in an environment like school. It is a fast rule to speak as such when students address teachers or other administrators, and probable that without its implementation, students' words, and by extension, requests or alerts, would be disregarded. Polite speech conveys not only serious intent but also ensures a subservience that students must display to assure their superiors that they are the ones in control. It is used thus when titles like "ma'am" must be used as addresses, to imply mastery, and when phrases like "please" and "may I" are thrown in to lend an impression of supplication to do simple requests. Human nature to assert power over those who ought to follow until they are capable of fulfilling their roles in a community has resulted in polite speech being the indication that respect must be conferred to those higher up in order for one to be taken seriously.

A common platform for polite speech is also when important personages such as politicians conduct ceremonies and must make celebratory addresses. These people know that their words will be broadcast to the general population. Since their continued influence relies on the goodwill of the people, polite speech is used in order to give the impression that their words are official and justified. It separates them from the lower population who use colloquialisms in their informal speech and places these people as higher up on the ladder of authority, to impress upon their subordinates formally that they ought to be followed. Throughout history, language has been associated with those in power and thus those in power continue to use it as the way to signify that they possess the capability to retain that power, and are fit for the position to lead. Being polite shows that they don't need to resort to baser tendencies to accomplish goods, and provides a veneer of respectability to their affairs.

Lastly, polite speech makes frequent appearances in the language of those working in service to the law, such as judges, lawyers, clerks, court officers, and other officials present during legal proceedings. As with the example mentioned previously, polite speech adds a sense of elevated respectability to proceedings. In venues where legal cases are being tried, polite speech also is utilized to make it seem as though the decisions made are right and completely justified. Because politeness is associated with propriety and thus ethical correctness, when it is used in official decisions it gives those affected, such as juries, accused, and witnesses the assurance that the ruling was fair and just. It is meant to be confirmation for those listening that it is likely unquestionable that justice was served. This once again is a product of the human need to be supported in their decisions. Human nature can be subject to doubt in all cases, but the polite speech used is able to confer a sense of resolution so that people feel secure about the rulings. After all, if they sound so correct, the rationalization is that it is similarly correct in meaning.

Therefore, it can be seen that although polite speech like regular communication may display intent, instead it in fact is used to relate politeness to the receiver. This connotes a subservient respectability and ethical rightness to the audience for it, and so functions as a method to persuade those receiving the words to the side of the speaker. The usage of polite speech preys on human susceptibility to ethos

and pathos in order to influence them to trust and support the speaker, and therefore it is evident that polite speech is much more than empty words.

### Sample 3B

In society, there are certain standards that are expected to be met. It is expected that, while meeting new people or old friends, you communicate with the age-old phrases. It is not necessarily required, but it is just the norm that is expected. But what function do typical, everyday pleasantries serve? Why do we never come up with new phrases? In my experience as an employee at a local yogurt shop, I find myself obligated to inquire how my customers are. It may not be much more than socially expected, but a polite "How are you?" can be more than a polite phrase. I know from experience that when asked "How are you?", there is a sense of being cared for. The speaker may not mean anything by the phrase aside from standard, but knowing that someone cares enough to inquire after their well-being can make a big difference. Sometimes I fail in asking this, but when I do, the customer, especially the older generation, seems genuinely surprised. Politeness seems to be a thing of the past, but when it's put into practice, the mood of a room can change with a simple phrase. Another function of polite, even colloquial phrases, is to show the world that one is not a stuck-up, arrogant human with no emotion for the well-being of others. As a teenager in today's society, it's hard to break the stereotypes placed upon us. Media and social networking have made my generation appear to be selfish, arrogant, and disrespectful towards themselves, peers, or elders. Politeness and caring are dying concepts and with the media only encouraging their destruction, it is difficult for teenagers to stand out from the stereotypes. Polite speech is also a show of respect. When asking someone how their day is going, one is saying that, whether they want to or not, they care about the other person's well-being. Most of the time, people respond with the expected "I am doing well, how are you?" but sometimes the question may start a conversation that has the potential to blossom into the beginnings of a new friendship.

Politeness is expected, and rudeness is generally unacceptable. There are things one is supposed to say, and things they are not supposed to say. And then there are things that people say that go beyond societal expectation. Inquiring after a person's well-being is a kind gesture, but offering a compliment is far more appreciated. I once offered a young woman a compliment on her appearance and she smiled broadly and told me I had just made her day.

People expect the normal, expected phrases, but when one goes beyond the expectation, great things happen.

Polite speech serves a purpose, and we can take that at the bare minimum, but when we go the distance and are kind as well as polite, we present ourselves in a newer, friendlier light.

Don't fit the typical mold. Go beyond expectation and offer a little more of yourself. Sometimes you get a response, other times you don't. But no matter the response, you will leave the situation feeling like a better person.

### Sample 3C

I see a casual acquaintance down the hall. I'm startled. I expected the answer to "Hey, how are you?" to be "Good, how are you?" Instead, I'm thrown headfirst into a conversation about his bad day without being able to switch topics from what I'd been focusing on before. My friend was impolite. I really don't mind listening to him talk about his day, but a little warning would've been nice. If I had said "How are you?" and he had said, "I'm alright, how about you?" or "Been better, you?" well then, I can say that I'm fine and ask what's wrong, and we've comfortably shifted into a conversation about a bad day. In short, these responses are more polite. In short, polite speech is intended to be just that: polite. Nice, comfortable, and friendly.

In the teenage world, many formalities are ignored. We don't dress fancy, we're not exactly quiet, and we're not too big on shaking hands with each other. But polite speech is something we hold on to. We say things like "Nice to meet you" when we're introduced to someone our age by a friend. "We should hang out one day" is also a big one for my age group. Do we mean it? Not always. Why do we say it? Consider the other option.

"Person A, meet Person B." "Hi, Person B, I didn't want to meet you." Well, they were honest. No, not honest, they were rude. Who cares if they didn't want to meet Person B? Who cares if Person B looks like a jerk and kind of smells bad? Person A ruins that whole exchange, not to mention they embarrassed Person C who introduced them. Long story short, now they're all pretty uncomfortable. No coming back from that one.

These polite forms are probably evolutions of older greetings and goodbyes. When people said "good day," was it always a good day? Probably not. When saying "charmed," after meeting someone, were people always charmed? I'm going to assume not. Our language has evolved to the point where "What's up?" replaces "hello," and "It was good to see you" can replace "goodbye." Rejecting them rejects our current social constructions. Honestly, some of our modern constructions should be rejected, they're outdated and bigoted, but these polite phrases shouldn't. They serve only to foster kindness.

Today, there's suffering, pain, crisis, despair, and many other horrible things that people go through every day. If we can soften that with a "have a good day," why wouldn't we?

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## 2015 SCORING COMMENTARY

### Question 3

#### Overview

The “Argument Question” was intended to elicit a demonstration of students’ skills in critical thinking and rhetorical crafting of written argumentation. This year’s prompt featured an observation, from an anthropological study of first-year students at an American university, that common, friendly phrases such as “How are you?”, “Nice to meet you,” and “Let’s get in touch” convey politeness rather than literal meaning. Students were asked to articulate their own positions on the “value or function” of polite speech in a community with which they were personally familiar, and to support their assertions with evidence or reasoning drawn from their reading, experience, or observation. Like the Synthesis Question, Question 3, in directing students to consider polite speech in a community familiar to them, asked students to apply the prompt to their own real world experiences. In offering students the option of arguing about either the function or the value of polite speech, the prompt encouraged students to shape their arguments as rhetorical analysis (What work do these phrases do in the world, and how so?) or evaluation (What is the worth of these phrases, and how so?). In asking students to consider three potential sources of support, the argument prompt encouraged students to employ synthetic thinking skills.

#### Sample: 3A Score: 8

This essay effectively argues that “polite speech is much more than empty words.” Using three well-developed examples, the essay convincingly demonstrates that polite speech in schools, official ceremonies, and in the legal system communicates more than “the literal meaning of the sentences.” In the example of students and teachers or administrators, the essay claims that “[p]olite speech conveys not only a serious intent but also ensures a subservience that students must display to assure their superiors that they are the ones in control.” This claim is supported by appropriate evidence and explanation: “titles like ‘ma’am’ must be used as addresses, to imply mastery, and ... phrases like ‘please,’ and ‘may I’ are thrown in to lend an impression of supplication to simple requests.” Similarly, the essay demonstrates that, in official contexts, “formal language has been associated with those in power and thus those in power continue to use it as the way to signify that they ... are fit for the position to lead.” In the final example, the essay examines how in legal contexts polite speech is used “to confer a sense of resolution so that people feel secure about the rulings.” The essay is especially coherent, its argument is well-developed, and its prose demonstrates a consistent ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing; for these qualities, the essay earned a score of 8.

#### Sample: 3B Score: 5

This essay develops the position that polite speech can create a pleasant social mood; indicate to others that “one is not a stuck-up, arrogant human with no emotion for the well being of others”; and be a way to show respect. The evidence and explanations are limited; for example, to support the claim that polite speech shows respect, the essay simply repeats an earlier point made to show polite speech creates a nice atmosphere: “When asking someone how their day is going one is saying that whether they want to or not, they care about the other person’s well being.” How polite speech functions to demonstrate respect is not explained or developed. The essay develops its position unevenly; toward the end, the student launches into a discussion of how “rudeness is socially unacceptable” and of how going beyond “the normal, expected phrases” can make “great things happen.” Neither of these points focuses upon the prompt, which asks students to consider the value or function of polite speech. The essay is able to advance a position in generally clear prose, but because it does so inconsistently and with limited evidence and explanation, it earned a score of 5.



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**2015 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 3 (continued)**

**Sample: 3C**

**Score: 3**

This essay inadequately develops its position that polite speech creates politeness and “foster[s] kindness.” The explanations provided are consistently insufficient. The essay begins by imagining a scenario in which a casual acquaintance is “impolite” because he answers the question of how he is, “[b]ad,” instead of first engaging in polite conversation. This explanation is unconvincing and leads to a circular assertion: polite speech “is intended to be just that: polite.” The student then includes another hypothetical conversation in which Person A, in response to being introduced, tells Person B, “I didn’t want to meet you.” While it’s true that such a blunt response would ruin “that whole exchange” and embarrass the person who introduced them, this is a limited and simplistic analysis of the value or function of polite speech. The essay neglects to develop or support its claim that polite speech “foster[s] kindness.” Although the prose generally conveys the student’s ideas, the essay’s overly simple explanation and limited development earned it a score of 3.