

2018 AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 2 - Suggested time—40 minutes.

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

In 1997, then United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright gave the commencement speech to the graduating class of Mount Holyoke College, a women's college in Massachusetts. Read the following excerpt from her speech carefully. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the choices Albright makes to convey her message to the audience.

As individuals, each of us must choose whether to live our lives narrowly, selfishly and complacently, or to act with courage and faith.

As a nation, America must choose whether to turn inward and betray the lessons of history, or to seize the opportunity before us to shape history. Today, under the leadership of President Clinton, America is making the right choice.

The Berlin Wall is now a memory. We could be satisfied with that. Instead, we are enlarging and adapting NATO¹ and striving to create a future for Europe in which every democracy — including Russia — is our partner and every partner is a builder of peace.

Largely because of U.S. leadership, nuclear weapons no longer target our homes. We could relax. Instead, we are working to reduce nuclear arsenals further, eliminate chemical weapons, end the child-maiming scourge of land mines and ratify a treaty that would ban nuclear explosions forever.

The fighting in Bosnia has stopped. We could turn our backs now and risk renewed war. Instead, we are renewing our commitment, and insisting that the parties meet theirs, to implement the Dayton Accords.² And we are backing the War Crimes Tribunal, because we believe that those responsible for ethnic cleansing should be held accountable and those who consider rape just another tactic of war should answer for their crimes.

We have built a growing world economy in which those with modern skills and available capital have done very well. We could stop there. Instead, we are pursuing a broader prosperity, in which those entrapped by poverty and discrimination are empowered to share, and

in which every democracy on every continent will be included.

In our lifetimes, we have seen enormous advances in the status of women. We could now lower our voices and — as some suggest — sit sedately down. Instead, women everywhere — whether bumping against a glass ceiling or rising from a dirt floor — are standing up, spreading the word that we are ready to claim our rightful place as full citizens and full participants in every society on Earth.

Mount Holyoke is the home, to borrow Wendy Wasserstein's phrase, of "uncommon women." But we know that there are uncommon women in all corners of the globe.

In recent years, I have met in Sarajevo with women weighted down by personal grief reaching out across ethnic lines to rebuild their shattered society.

In Burundi, I have seen women taking the lead in efforts to avoid the fate of neighboring Rwanda, where violence left three-quarters of the population female, and one-half of the women widows.

In Guatemala, I have talked to women striving to ensure that their new peace endures and is accompanied by justice and an end to discrimination and abuse.

And in Burma, I have met with a remarkable woman named Aung San Suu Kyi, who risks her life every day to keep alive the hope for democracy in her country.

These women have in common a determination to chart their own path, and by so doing, to alter for the better the course of their country or community. Each has suffered blows, but each

has proceeded with courage. Each has persevered.

As you go along your own road in life, you will, if you aim high enough, also meet resistance, for as Robert Kennedy once said, “if there’s nobody in your way, it’s because you’re not going anywhere.” But no matter how tough the opposition may seem, have courage still—and persevere.

There is no doubt, if you aim high enough, that you will be confronted by those who say that your efforts to change the world or improve the lot of those around you do not mean much in the grand scheme of things. But no matter how impotent you may sometimes feel, have courage still — and persevere.

It is certain, if you aim high enough, that you will find your strongest beliefs ridiculed and challenged; principles that you cherish may be derisively dismissed by those claiming to be more practical or realistic than you. But no matter how weary you may become in persuading others to see the value in what you value, have courage still—and persevere.

Inevitably, if you aim high enough, you will be buffeted by demands of family, friends and employment that will conspire to distract you from your course. But no matter how difficult it may be to meet the commitments you have made, have courage still—and persevere.

It has been said that all work that is worth anything is done in faith.

This morning, in these beautiful surroundings, at this celebration of warm memory and high expectation, I summon you in the name of this historic college and of all who have passed through its halls, to embrace the faith that your courage and your perseverance will make a difference; and that every life enriched by your giving, every friend touched by your affection, every soul inspired by your passion and every barrier to justice brought down by your determination, will ennoble your own life, inspire others, serve your country, and explode outward the boundaries of what is achievable on this earth.

¹ military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty of April 4, 1949

² peace agreement ending the war in Bosnia, signed in 1995

2018 Exam Question #2 Task: Synthesis Topic: Albright commencement speech
Max. Points: 9 Mean Score: 4.54

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This year's rhetorical analysis question asked students to identify and evaluate the rhetorical choices made in a commencement address, specifically a speech by Madeleine Albright to the graduating class of 1997 at Mount Holyoke College. As in past years, this year's prompt asked students to consider the rhetorical situation a speaker faces and analyze the choices that the speaker makes in order to elicit appropriate or desirable responses from an audience.

Also as in past years, the prompt provided students with key historical information and context. For students who may not have known anything about this history or context, the prompt supplied specifics regarding the audience ("Mount Holyoke College, a women's college in Massachusetts") and date (1997) and noted the speaker's leadership position at the time ("then United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright"). This year's task differed from previous iterations in that it was significantly lengthier; however, its language was very accessible to students.

Within their responses to this rhetorical analysis question, students were expected to explain the choices Albright made in her particular situation for her particular audience and how these choices work. To understand these choices and how they work, a student must first consider the rhetor's relationship to the audience, as well as how this relationship necessitates both what this specific rhetor should include in—and exclude from—the speech to this specific audience. Additionally, a student must consider how the rhetor arranges the speech for the particular audience in the specific circumstances of the speech. While elements of style certainly merit consideration, they are not the first ingredient on which rhetors focus when developing strategies to persuade audiences: Style is the third canon of rhetoric, not the first or even the second.

In other words, to do well, students needed to understand the purpose of Albright's speech, what the relationship must have been between Albright and her audience, what the audience's attitude toward Albright's message might have been, and how Albright's specific rhetorical choices worked to make the audience more responsive to her purpose.

How well did the response address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Students had more success responding to Question 2 than in previous years: The adjusted mean score is notably higher than in previous years. This is the fourth consecutive year in which students have improved the mean on this question.

This year's higher mean score is largely due to a more accessible prompt that gave students a greater opportunity to succeed. Although the prompt did not inform students that the text was a motivational speech, students could quickly recognize the inspirational nature of Albright's address. Specifically, the length and more accessible language of this year's prompt impacted student responses in at least two significant ways:

- the prompt's length and accessibility enabled students to write longer responses on average than they have in previous years; and
- the variety of rhetorical choices in Albright's speech allowed students a wider range of materials to analyze—and thus more ways to write a successful analysis.

Albright's speech offered a wide range of rhetorical approaches that most students readily identified. Almost every student understood the rhetorical situation of Albright's speech, although higher-scoring essays more fully grasped its complexity. Students generally understood Albright's desire to motivate her audience and

her use of anecdotes to illustrate not only how much the United States has accomplished in the recent past, but also the crucial roles that women must play in its present and future.

This year, more students than in previous years analyzed the passage without referring to traditional rhetorical terms. As a result, more students focused their energies on explaining what the speaker did and how this choice influenced the success of the rhetoric. Students tended to write more well-developed essays, instead of using explicit rhetorical terms only.

Overall, student performance on this question has improved compared to student performance in past years. Many of the responses effectively discussed Albright’s choices in terms of parallel structure, repetition, and specific kinds of diction. Essays scoring 7 or higher (out of a possible 9 points) convincingly linked Madeleine Albright’s choices to her intended effect on her audience. Some of the best essays did so fully and explicitly, demonstrating how and why Albright “wants her audience to understand” or “forces her audience to acknowledge” key ideas in her speech, chief among them “that perseverance is the key to continued struggle.” Other high-scoring essays focused on repetition, specifically *anaphora*, as an effective choice to deliver the speech’s intended message to its audience. One such essay emphasized “frequent repetition [to] emphasize the need to continue fighting for what you believe in,” a message the student found “especially applicable to Albright’s audience of female college graduates.” Higher-scoring essays also addressed Albright’s appeal to quintessential American values (such as national pride and the spreading of peace and democracy around the world) instead of relying on the language of ethos, logos, et al. Addressing specific values instead of generic rhetorical terms demonstrated a clearer and more convincing understanding of the rhetorical situation.

Less successful essays often did focus on standard rhetorical terms, but the approach did not make them more successful. Lower-scoring essays, whether organized around Albright’s specific appeals or the standard tropes, were more descriptive than analytical. Such essays often did identify Albright’s choices, but did not link those choices to their intended effect on her audience. Mid-to-lower-scoring essays almost all followed what has come to be called the “drive-by” trend; a well-worn structure in which a sentence introduces a trope (e.g., anaphora or pathos), which leads directly to an example and a cursory (often one-sentence) explanation of its role in the speech.

Responses were generally longer than in past years. Even essays scoring a 1 or 2 (out of a possible 9 points) had something to say and did attempt some analysis, although they fell far short. Such responses are partly due to a lengthy, accessible prompt that gave students more material to work with than in past years.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
Students focused on summarizing the speech rather than analyzing it.	“[Albright] states the past, ‘the Berlin Wall is now a memory’, then a hypothetical, ‘We could be satisfied with that’, and then America’s continued work, ‘creating a future’ and building world peace. This powerful form of presenting what has been accomplished then a hypothetical paired with reality is a powerful way to allude to the idea that accomplishing is not enough, we must never stop trying to get better. Without the hypothetical, her statements engender awe and pride in her

	<p>audience for the progress of America on the world state. But that is not what Albright wants. Albright wants her audience to understand that this continued effort is advancements while ignoring the world. By adding the hypothetical, she forces her audience to acknowledge this America is going above and beyond, some hard to do but accomplishable.”</p> <p>This passage analyzes as it describes. This student quotes Albright, illustrating Albright’s use of the subjunctive (the hypothetical) and indicative (the reality) moods. The student then explains how the text would have worked without the subjunctive voice. The author then states that without the subjunctive, Albright’s text would not have achieved her purpose—and the student reiterates Albright’s purpose.</p>
<p>Students identified rhetorical terms or choices without explaining how the choice worked in Albright’s rhetorical situation.</p>	<p>“Albright’s frequent repetition and powerful tone emphasize many of her points even further. From lines 69 to 93, Albright ends each paragraph with the words ‘have courage still and persevere.’ She repeats these words to emphasize the need to continue fighting for what you believe in even in the face of doubt and criticism. This is especially applicable to Albright’s audience of female college graduates. Because of their youth, and sometimes because of their gender, they will all face fierce opposition at some point and they may face people who don’t take them seriously. Albright reiterates the need to push through in the face of these challenges.”</p> <p>Instead of stating “Albright uses epistrophe,” the student paraphrases what Albright does and then moves to explain why this choice is particularly helpful in Albright’s rhetorical situation. advancements while ignoring the world. By adding the hypothetical she forces her audience to acknowledge this America is going above and beyond, some hard to do but accomplishable.”</p> <p>This passage analyzes as it describes. This student quotes Albright, illustrating Albright’s use of the subjunctive (the hypothetical) and indicative (the reality) moods. The student then explains how the text would have worked without the subjunctive voice. The author then states that without the subjunctive, Albright’s text would not have achieved her purpose—and the student reiterates Albright’s purpose.</p>

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

1. First, I want to applaud teachers who have “heard the call” to start focusing more on the speaker/writer’s rhetorical situation and less on rhetorical terms. The increase in score appears to have resulted from this change. Teachers should continue what they appear to be doing in the classroom, extending students’ abilities to analyze rhetorically to other situations students encounter, explicitly to their reading of passages such as the sources in the synthesis question of this exam.

2. Many students appear to have “pre-packaged” responses to this question, and these pre-packaged responses often hinder students’ abilities to do well. Such pre-packaged responses take various forms. One is that students appear to have been taught formulas for responding (e.g., “In [date], [speaker/writer] addressed [audience] in order to [purpose] using [three rhetorical choices].” The student then uses a five-paragraph essay structure to describe these three choices). Another is that students aim for a choice that may have worked on past exams they have considered in class (e.g., use of first or second person), but does not work particularly well for the passage the students are analyzing on the exam.

3. Teachers can emphasize that the rhetorical analysis question does not have “correct” answers. Often, both successful and unsuccessful responses identify the same rhetorical features within a passage; however, what makes some responses successful and others unsuccessful is not the “identification” of the features, but the students’ abilities to explain how those features work within the writer/speaker’s rhetorical situation. Too often, students list what a speaker does, appearing to think that the more successful choices they identify, the better they’ll do on the exam; instead, success comes from the ability to dig deep into the explanations of *why* and *how* the choices work in the particular contexts.