

2018 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 her book *Gift from the Sea*, author and aviator Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1906–2001) writes, “We tend not to choose the unknown which might be a shock or a disappointment or simply a little difficult to cope with. And yet it is the unknown with all its disappointments and surprises that is the most enriching.”

Consider the value Lindbergh places on choosing the unknown. Then write an essay in which you develop your own position on the value of exploring the unknown. Use appropriate, specific evidence to illustrate and develop your position.

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2018 AP[®] English Language and Composition Free-Response Question

The following comments on the 2018 free-response questions for AP[®] English Language were written by the Chief Reader, Elizabeth A. Wright, Professor, University of Minnesota Duluth. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The argument prompt asked that students read a quote from Anne Morrow Lindbergh’s *Gift from the Sea* and write an essay in which they develop a position on the value of exploring the unknown. Therefore, the students were expected to demonstrate some understanding of what the unknown might be.

Students were then expected to take a position on Lindbergh’s statement and to support that claim with discussion of ways in which the unknown has or does not have value.

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?

The prompt was accessible for the vast majority of students, with many responding with understanding and ease. Christopher Columbus, Lewis and Clark, and the space race were frequently summoned as examples to illustrate how the unknown can be rewarding; fewer students argued that the unknown is not rewarding, though many excellent essays did do so.

In upper-half essays, students responded to Lindbergh’s quote by calling on the likes of JFK, Galileo, and a laundry list of other scientists, explorers, and astronauts, as well as musicians, and philosophers. However, students also wrote about experiences traveling abroad, sailing for 17 days with a team of their peers, participating in a Mock UN, meeting the love of their lives, and rope climbing for the first time—all of which demonstrated for them what happened when the unknown is explored. They were able to create seamless transitions even when they were drawing on a variety of evidence to support their positions.

Essays that scored in the lower half of the scoring guide were less successful in acknowledging and offering adequate support for how Lindbergh’s words were made manifest through a variety of examples—some historic, some literary, some cultural, and some personal. Students’ successes were not predicated exclusively on the kinds of evidence employed, as students scored in both the upper and lower halves by using literary, historic, cultural, and personal experiences. Success with this prompt rested with students’ abilities to employ evidence and then articulate how that evidence functions in support of the value in exploring the unknown.

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> |
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| Students defined the unknown without stating a position on Lindbergh’s claim. | “Exploration and experimentation have been two important factors for the development of human society. Without either, many facets of our modern day society and culture would simply not exist. A |

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| | <p>main driver behind both exploration and experimentation is the thrill of excitement of discovering or doing something new. In life, doing something unknown to us is often where most of our experiences and memories will be made. 'Choosing' this unknown is vital for the development of society, and the development of ourselves."</p> <p>Here the student both defines the "unknown" (exploration and experimentation) and takes the position that such a choice of the unknown is "vital."</p> |
| <p>Student repeat their claim via paraphrases of the claim instead of supporting the claim.</p> | <p>"The principles of science are synonymous with exploration of the unknown. President John F. Kennedy is famously quoted as saying that the US would land on the moon 'not because it is easy, but because it is hard.' In the face of public uncertainty, Kennedy set out to explore one of the biggest unknowns of modern humanity: outer space. Obviously, the moon landing was successful, and the subsequent technological development benefited all aspects of society. Billions were allocated in research funding and as a result, humanity expanded its sphere of knowledge greatly. Yet, this is not a recent phenomenon. One of the most famous scientists in history, Galileo Galilei, chose to explore and challenge commonly held truth. He was ridiculed for claiming that the Earth revolved around the Sun, yet it was his desire to enter into the unfamiliar that led to the scientific advances by the US under Kennedy so many years later."</p> <p>Instead of simply asserting (as many students do) that "science shows the value of exploring the unknown," this student explains the unknown and why the exploration of it was valuable.</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. When working with students, teachers need to help students understand that the first step in the process of writing an on-demand essay is to dissect, and therefore comprehend, the prompt. Students who understood that their charge was to take a position on the "value of exploring the unknown" did do fairly well, using a variety of evidence to support their position.
2. Once students clearly understand what the prompt is asking of them, teachers might consider helping them to then understand that when they chose a variety of kinds/types of evidence as support for their position, they should focus on finding ways to articulate how the different pieces fit together. Students should learn that this will help their audience understand how the variety of

evidence connects back to what the prompt is asking. Essays that accomplished this feat were less disjointed; more full and complete.

3. Teachers need to emphasize that paraphrasing the claim in various ways is not a means of supporting the claim.
4. Students need to learn to explain how the evidence they choose illustrates why their claim is valid. What many lower-level essays do is list examples and then assert that the example supports the claim. Students should explain *how* the example illustrates the truth of the claim.