

AP English Language and Composition
Question 3: Argument
2020 Scoring Commentaries
(Applied to 2018 Student Responses)

Sample C

6/6 Points (A1 - B4 - C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row A because it clearly takes a position that exploring the unknown is valuable. In the first paragraph the response sets up a connection with the quote in the prompt and then lays out the categories for the reasoning that will follow: “The exploration of the unknown has led to unprecedented scientific development, cultural development, and personal development alike.” The response is driven by the thesis throughout, cumulating in its clear articulation in the concluding sentence “The unknown has allowed the human race to develop, improve, and augment itself scientifically, culturally, and personally, and for those causes, it is clearly incredibly valuable.”

Row B: 4/4

The response earned 4 points for Row B because the evidence provided clearly relates to the thesis and the commentary that explains those connections is consistent and well-developed. While over the course of this response the argument becomes not just that “unexpected moments are ‘the most fulfilling’” but that the most beneficial and forward-thinking advancements come from challenging a status quo and engaging with the unknown. The range of examples is far-reaching, – following the parameters established in the thesis as the evidence for the argument. In paragraph 2, the response moves from an example of JFK challenging the American space program to explore the unknown “not because it is easy, but because it is hard” and then shifts to the example of Galileo and “his desire to enter into the unfamiliar that led to the scientific advances.” The commentary then solidifies the point of this example as it provides a list of scientists in the same vein as Galileo who “made their names by engaging with the unknown.” The value of “engaging with the unknown” being the advancement of humanity who “will forever be indebted to [those scientists] for their tenacity”. The response then moves to the cultural importance of music in paragraph 3, explicitly explaining how Bach, who “by exploring new territory in music, changed the face of string and orchestral music...” and Shostakovich “are known for being barrier-breakers.” Ultimately, the commentary explains that culture has benefitted from these composers who were not afraid of “breaking the constraints of cultural norms and exploring the unknown,” again connecting directly to, and furthering, the thesis. Finally, the literary example of Henry David Thoreau’s transcendental philosophy explains how he engaged the unknown as he “famously spent a period of his life living in seclusion.” The response then explains that the positive results of Thoreau’s experiences were the “new genre” of his writings and the way those writings speak to people’s personal development. While much of this example reads like a summary of Thoreau’s experience, there is enough commentary that connects those details to the thesis to make it an effective example.

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Row C: 1/1

While there are multiple reasons that the response earned the point for Row C, the most effective is the choice to connect each example to the others in a textually engaging and interesting way. There are intentional and effective reference to other examples throughout the response. Beyond simply transitioning from one paragraph to another (which this response does well) statements such as “[l]ike scientists, musicians are known for being barrier-breakers” (paragraph 3), and “[l]ike Bach and Shostakovich, Thoreau helped to establish a new genre is his craft” (paragraph 4) illustrate thoughtful and sophisticated planning to not just acknowledge other examples but also link them topically in order to create a cohesion that is often uncharacteristic of exam responses.

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Sample G

6/6 Points (A1 - B4 - C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row A because it does provide a defensible thesis that clearly portrays a position that “venturing into the unknown is a worthwhile experience for the maturity and growth it can promote” (paragraph 2). Though this does not appear in the first paragraph, it is important to note that the thesis may appear anywhere in the text, as long as there is a statement of a clearly defensible position.

Row B: 4/4

The response earned four points for Row B because the evidence provided relates to the thesis and the commentary is well-developed and consistent. In paragraph 1, the response begins with a personal anecdote about ropes course, which begins to illustrate the claims of the thesis to come in the next paragraph. The end of that anecdote explains how “[n]owadays, climbing is one of my favorite activities” and goes on to explain the benefit of the experience: “if I had not ventured out of my comfort zone into the unknown and frightening, then I may have never climbed at all for the rest of my life.” This does well to establish the positive attitude toward the “value of exploring the unknown” and effectively leads into a more conceptual and philosophical exploration of the unknown and its value in paragraph 2, culminating in the thesis. Though not organized as well as the first two paragraphs, paragraph 3 does provide more apt examples related to exploration of the unknown. Briefly commenting on the Christopher Columbus “having no knowledge of what lay [sic] ahead” despite the “possible negative repercussions.” Paragraph 3 then goes on to provided smaller examples of performers and musicians who “may forget song lyrics” or who “might miss some notes” and other examples of those who faced uncertainty but left with positive experiences. The rest of the commentary then becomes broad comments on taking chances with the unknown the value of the experience and the learning involved – including a brief example of Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps who “overcame childhood worries about swimming, overcame worries about being in the spotlight, and thrived.” While these examples do venture into a positions regarding taking risks, the commentary does regularly bring them back to the idea of facing the unknown being that risk which also remains in the spirit of the original Lindbergh comment.

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row C because it employs effective rhetorical choices (the diving metaphor in paragraph 2) and situates the argument in a broader context through its range of examples: climbing, Columbus, Phelps. All of these examples are effectively tied together in a cohesive comment on the value of the unknown. The prose is more than simply effective in communicating the argument, it helps to develop the argument through complex sentence structure and complex sentence relationships as indicated by the following:

“However, in most cases, the times when people are most nervous about something is right

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before they actually do it. Once they take the plunge, they realize this unknown experience is not all that bad. Imagination makes things out much worse than they really are, so new experiences can even be relishing” (paragraph 2) and “Performers may forget song lyrics, or musicians might miss some notes, climbers might fall early. But with each failure, people become more familiar with the unknown. They learn how to recover from mistakes, how to never even make any” (paragraph 3).

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Sample E

5/6 Points (A1 - B3 - C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row A because it provides a defensible thesis in the last two sentences of paragraph 1: “The exploration of the unknown is critical to the development of a person and allows them to break out of perceived limitations. The value of exploring the unknown is rooted in its ability to expand a person [sic] view of the world and themselves while simultaneously crafting memorable experiences and breaking previously perceived personal barriers.”

Row B: 3/4

The response earned three points for Row B because the examples provided relate to the thesis but the commentary on that evidence remains, at times, uneven and incomplete. The examples extend directly from the reasoning supplied in the thesis. In paragraph 2, the example of personal growth through experiences with the unknown develops into a comment that “that persons view of the world and themselves is perminatly changed [sic].” It then restates this idea in the very next sentence before providing the apt personal anecdote. That anecdote, however, is followed by a vague comment on how “people can learn a lot and grow tremendously as a person by expanding their world view.” Though this does imply a connection back to the thesis regarding the “value of exploring the unknown,” that implication is not enough to sustain the argument and the response nearly veers off topic into a related argument about expanding one’s world view. In paragraph 3, the Model UN example is very similar to that of the previous paragraph. A personal anecdote, it follows the reasoning established in the thesis as it focuses on “crafting memorable experience,” but then retreats to commentary very similar to that from the previous paragraph, explaining that the memories of the experience “would not exist if I did not venture into the unknown and put myself out there.” The response then provides another example regarding a friend “who was hesitant to take AP classes” but then flourished having “journed [sic] into the unknown and taken these classes.” These clearly positive examples are connected to the thesis, by only a single comment about how “exploring the unknown is ecencial [sic],” but there is little else provided to explain the anecdotes. That said, there is certainly more direct connection between the commentary in paragraph 3 than that in paragraph 4.

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row C because it situates the argument in a broader context by using personal examples. In paragraph 2 the response posits that “...through the exploration of the unknown...people can learn a lot and grow tremendously as a person by expanding their worldview.” This idea is reinforced in paragraph 3 and it focus on “expanding your boundaries” and then again in paragraph 4 where the response reflects back on the thesis and how “...the value of exploring the unknown lies in the tremendous personal growth a person experiences

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through expanded perspectives, new memories, and new expanded boundaries.” This argument remains consistent and focused throughout the introduction and examination of each of its examples.

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Sample I

4/6 Points (A1 - B3 - C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row A because it provides a defensible thesis that suggests a line of reasoning: “‘Choosing’ this unknown is vital for the development of society, and the development of ourselves” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 3/4

The response earned 3 points for Row B because the evidence provided relates to the thesis but the commentary that explains those connections is limited and incomplete. In paragraph 2, the response offers vague incomplete commentary on some non-specific examples related to how “ingenuitive [*sic*] and intelligent” humans are and then explains that none of these advances would be possible without “exploration or experimentation with the unknown.” While this commentary becomes repetitive, the response does provide a more specific example of human ingenuity with an example related to Space X, but the commentary directly related to that example remains very limited. The response then provides the social interaction example – again, in line with the reasoning established in the thesis, albeit with more incomplete commentary. The response explains that “[t]rying new things is how people develop themselves,” but then goes on to only restate this idea in different ways before providing an example of an introverted child who “...will miss out on many fun experiences and relationships.” However, the response almost immediately returns to restatements of the necessity of facing the unknown without any further explanation of supporting examples.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C. While the response does attempt to engage some complexities related to the argument, it does not sustain these complexities in a way that places them in dialogue or helps the reader better understand the full scale of the argument in its context. For example, admitting that it “is widely known that humans try to resist changes,” the same sentence then returns to the argument that “those that are tempted to explore unknowns are often rewarded heavily and society benefits as a result.” This could have been a significant point of examination or exploration but these contrasting ideas are not maintained throughout the response as would be necessary to relay the complexity of the issue.

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Sample B

3/6 Points (A1 - B2 - C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row A because it does provide a thesis that exploring the unknown “is not always a good thing.” The thesis then continues by providing a line of reasoning that exploring the unknown may prove “costly, time consuming, and even harmful to the development of humankind” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 2/4

The response earned 2 points for Row B because, while it does provide examples relevant to the thesis, the commentary oversimplifies and misinterprets them. Following the reasoning established in the thesis, paragraph 2 uses the example of NASA and its use of “millions of dollars for space exploration every year” to illustrate the unnecessary cost of “exploring the unknown.” Making the comment that “[t]ime spent trying to discover the unknown could be used for other tasks” shifts the argument to be about time, not money as established earlier in the paragraph and, though there could be a comment made equating time to money, it is not there, meaning that idea related to actual monetary costs remains implied at best, with little development. The shift to time in paragraph 2 could work as a transition to paragraph 3, but the examples of “[t]ime spent trying to discover the unknown” remain ambiguous, concluding with a self-contradictory question “Why spend time trying to discover unknown things in life, when there are still so many things that need to be solved today?” The “many disasters” brought about by exploration of the unknown in “many horror movies” in paragraph 4 remains focused on both the position of thesis and the reasoning established in the thesis. While the idea that exploration of the unknown will lead to “disappointment rather than fulfillment” is focused, the very little development of the argument often relies on oversimplification of how such examples could work.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C. While there are a number of points throughout where the response attempts to introduce counterarguments, these often rely only on a simplistic phrase instead of a concentrated and focused effort to engage complexities of the argument. For example, each body paragraph of the response (numbers 2, 3, and 4) begins with a nod to opposing viewpoints, but demonstrates neither an understanding of, nor a willing to engage with, the facts or details of those viewpoints.

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Sample A

3/6 Points (A1 - B2 - C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row A because it does provide a defensible thesis: “Although some people tend to not chase the unknown to explore, it would be beneficial for them to do so.” The rest of the sentence suggests a line of reasoning for the argument, and attempts to contextualize it as it comments that those afraid to engage the unknown “can never know if there is something better in life if they never explore in order to find it” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 2/4

The response earned 2 points for Row B because it provides examples relevant to the subject, but the commentary that explains them merely repeats and oversimplifies. For example, in paragraph 2, the comment that “Clark would not have met his wife, Sacajawea” had he not ventured forth on his journey could be an apt point, but there is little commentary to explain how this directly connects to the thesis. What commentary there is lapses into another – albeit related – idea of satisfaction with one’s life. In paragraph 3, the 49ers example is more focused on the value of exploring the unknown, but does not sufficiently explain how the example illustrates that value beyond a statement that “because the unknown could end up holding a gold nugget.” There is no commentary here beyond implications, meaning that the response bears little responsibility for explaining the argument.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C. It does contextualize the argument in paragraph 1 by expressing concern that those afraid to engage the unknown “can never know if there is something better in life if they never explore in order to find it,” and returns to that context in the beginning of the two body paragraphs. The lack of development in the rest of the response prevents it from earning this point as the lack of commentary to effectively explain the examples also means that a connection to the context cannot be effectively established.

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Sample F

2/6 Points (A1 – B1 - C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row A because, in paragraph 4, it does provide a defensible thesis “that exploring the unknown is essential to be a well-cultured and intelligent individual.”

Row B: 1/4

The response earned 1 point for Row B because it provides examples relevant to the subject, but very little commentary. While paragraph 2 creates a distinction useful between types of the “unknown,” it does very little to explore this distinction relative to the thesis, only finding ways to restate the same idea related to food. The example related to people being “naturally adventurous” (paragraph 3) shows promise but relies on unexplained assumptions that are in no way connected to the thesis by commentary. The following paragraphs proceed to restate the initial thesis with repetition of similar ideas in paragraph 4 and then briefly comment on the state of people and curiosity that implies a loosely connection to the thesis.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C. It does attempt to contextualize the argument relative to all people, but never goes beyond blanket statements about “[s]ome people” (paragraph 3) and generalized and unsubstantiated comments about humanity as a “we.”

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Sample D

1/6 Points (A0 - B1 - C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row A. It does not present a defensible thesis, instead offering musings about the subject or the prompt.

Row B: 1/4

The response earned one point for Row B because it provides examples relevant to the subject, but there is little or no commentary. In paragraph 2, the response attempts to define the unknown, while also reflecting on personal experiences seemingly related to unknowns, but there is never any commentary trying to explain the relevance of these experiences nor any commentary that could be seen as providing (implicitly or explicitly) a position on the value of the unknown.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C. While a single anecdote used to exemplify a claim across an essay could develop an argument and even represent a complex response, there are many other issues with the development of this argument that prevent this response from approaching earning this point.

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Sample H

1/6 Points (A0 - B1 - C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row A. While it does provide a statement that includes positions on the value of opportunities to explore the unknown, explaining that “[s]ometimes, these oppertunities [sic] are great,” it then equivocates by stating that “[o]ther times, they can lead to mistakes or ‘a dissapointment.’[sic]”. This equivocation means the sample never offers a discernably defensible thesis.

Row B: 1/4

The response earned 1 point for Row B because it provides examples relevant to the subject, but offers no commentary or explanation. The examples of humans living on a “schedule” and people missing out on “opportunities ... due to possible dissapointment [sic]” are certainly related to the subject of the prompt, but there is so little commentary that these connections can only be implied. Were the examples better explained and accompanied by commentary, this very well could have earned 2 points in this row.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C.