

AP English Language and Composition
Question 1: Synthesis
2020 Scoring Commentaries
(Applied to 2018 Student Responses)

Sample I

6/6 Points (A1 - B4 - C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for row A because it presents a thoughtful, multi-sentence thesis that indicates a clear position and establishes a line of reasoning. In paragraph 1, the response provides relevant context to set up its insightful thesis: “Although eminent domain can be abused to benefit private interests at the expense of citizens, it is a vital tool of government that intends to have any influence on the land it governs beyond that of written law.” This qualified position sets up the line of reasoning for the rest of the essay.

Row B: 4/4

The response earned 4 points for row B because the evidence provided clearly relates to the thesis and the commentary engages specific details from the sources to draw conclusions relative to the thesis – making it especially well-developed. For example, in paragraph 2, the response introduces the concept from the Camey source that eminent domain might be misused, delivering no positive effects. In doing so, the response specifically uses a small detail from that source – “weeds and rubble” – to establish an image that will be developed using evidence from two additional sources: the Detroit example from the Sornin source and the New London example from the Carney source. The commentary on these sources is used to develop the concept that local governments “will often use [eminent domain], originally intended for the creation of productive public lands, as a societal vacuum cleaner to clean out impoverished areas in the hopes of seducing a business into moving in and revitalizing the town.” Having examined the concerns surrounding eminent domain, the response then shifts to develop its most important idea: “However, characterizing eminent domain by its small-scale failures ignores its larger, more ubiquitous implications” (paragraph 3). Now focusing on the thesis of the essay, the response continues to integrate source information throughout as it also provides well-developed commentary that effectively explains the relationship between the evidence and the thesis: “Many of America’s most cherished infrastructure systems are the result of [eminent domain].”

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row C because there are several instances where it situates the argument in a broader context. For example, in paragraph 1 the response acknowledges “occasional failures” of eminent domain and asserts they are “overshadowed by the resounding successes of many of the larger, often nationwide attempts of the government to construct much-needed infrastructure...” In paragraph 3, the response recognizes the implications of the argument: “Used as intended, eminent domain goes beyond small-scale revitalization and ventures into the realm of sweeping progress and development. Also, the vocabulary and style enhance the argument by developing vivid, persuasive, and convincing metaphors for understanding (e.g., “...as a societal vacuum cleaner” or “...the death knell of a fading town”).

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Sample E

6/6 Points (A1 - B4 - C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for row A because it provides a thesis with a clearly defensible position against eminent domain: “While there are many who argue the [sic] eminent domain can be used to revitalize, this power often exploits lower-income areas, violates 5th amendment rights, and often fails at the intended good.”

Row B: 4/4

The response earned 4 points for row B because the evidence provided clearly relates to the thesis and the interspersed commentary explains those connections consistently. The opening anecdote in paragraph 1 about the “district of Fells Point” provides initial evidence for the reasoning behind the position against eminent domain. Related to the Fells Point anecdote, paragraph 2 again addresses how “eminent domain proposes to help these areas,” but then shifts to the quote from source B defining “corporatism” followed by commentary connecting the exploits of corporatism to abuse of eminent domain. Having established the possible abuses of eminent domain, the response then looks to the dangers of those abuses as they may disproportionately affect certain groups based on the idea from source C that “overt racism is rarely a factor in modern takings” making it clear that “unconscious bias plays a role.” Making connection between bias and unfair compensation, the commentary then transitions from paragraph 3 to paragraph 4 by extending the discussion of problems of unfair compensation and effectively synthesizing information from sources F and A.

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row C because there are several instances where it situates the argument in a broader context. For example, in paragraph 1 the response presents a relevant personal example that provides a more sophisticated understanding of the issue. The response also presents counterargument and refutation. For example, in paragraph 3: “Oftentimes, the counter argument to the use of eminent domain is that the people whose homes have been taken from them will have a new benefit to look forward to such as a highway, community center, or park, but when your home has been taken from you, the prospect of a highway will not compensate that loss.”

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Sample B

5/6 Points (A1 - B3 - C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for row A because it presents a clear thesis, explaining that “the ends do not justify the means [of eminent domain].” The thesis then establishes a line of reasoning that eminent domain “is unethical and un-American to sacrifice the rights of the poor, the needy, and the few under the guise of ‘the greater good’.”

Row B: 3/4

The response earned 3 points for row B because the evidence provided clearly relates to the thesis, though the commentary that explains those connections is incomplete and uneven. The response establishes a pattern of addressing the intentions of eminent domain and then addressing the shortcomings. Paragraph 2 follows this pattern, then shifts to the definition and intention of eminent domain as at one time “necessary” but then asks, “now that we already have land set aside for public use, is it really necessary to continue forcing people off their private land?”. However, the commentary then becomes very uneven, making blanket comments about parks, monuments, and public buildings that may extend from the original argument, but the commentary neither explains how that matters – leaving the reader to make the connections – nor linking it to the evidence from which it seems to derive. Paragraph 3 concedes the point that eminent domain was originally intended to serve the needs of the public. Using source B, the response provides specific detail about the supposed benefits of eminent domain. Having established these supposed benefits, the response then returns to the thesis shifting to evidence from source C about how eminent domain ultimately harms “the poor, racial minorities and politically weak”. After providing this evidence, the response develops commentary explaining the ways in which eminent domain proves harmful to those communities; however, this commentary is limited as it predominantly restates information from the sources.

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point for Row C because there are instances where it situates the argument in a broader context. For example, in paragraph 1 the response provides a sophisticated concession: “The most common defenses for eminent domain while well-intended, are ultimately built of flawed concepts that go against the American value of individual freedom.” In paragraph 4, the response recognizes the implications of the argument: “... especially over the past few decades when corporations have had a major hand in politics. Eminent domain as we know it is a civil rights violation that destroys poor and minority communities in favor of corporate profit.”

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Sample D

4/6 Points (A1 - B3 - C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for row A because it provides a defensible thesis in paragraph 1 that “Eminent Domain is productive and beneficial because the government needs it to provide for its citizens and the people receive full compensation for what is lost.” While it does not provide a line of reasoning, the position on eminent domain is both clear and defensible.

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 particular, the commentary provides links between the evidence and the thesis that are sometimes strained. In paragraph 2, the response provides an incomplete and vague explanation of Source A: “[Eminent domain] provides what the government otherwise could not, in places where government can not [sic] reach. This power allows the authorities to help people with the needs of [sic] otherwise could not.” This commentary is used to support the simplistic assertion that “Eminent Domain only helps people.” In paragraph 3, the response provides uneven explanation of Source D: “Compensation for their ruined property provided for the future of those people. It allowed them to sell the property that otherwise couldn’t have been sold.” Both examples demonstrate commentary that only provides a limited explanation of the relationship between the source evidence the thesis that doesn’t really engage with the details of the sources. The conclusions drawn in the commentary are limited and tend towards the simplistic (“Eminent Domain compensates what is lost, thus only further helping people”) and as such, don’t meet the descriptors “explicit explanation” or “well-developed” required for 4 points.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C because its explanations are somewhat repetitive and do not reflect a complex understanding of the issue. The personal example provided in paragraph 4 attempts to contextualize the argument but appears only vaguely related to the topic and does not provide significant insight or sophistication of thought.

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Sample H

4/6 Points (A1 - B3 - C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for row A because it does provide a clear and defensible thesis that “the practice [of eminent domain] becomes unjustified” in certain circumstances. It then goes on to provide those circumstances, which mostly reflect the reasoning of the argument that eminent domain is wrong “when minorities are victimize[d], a ‘reasonable compensation’ is not attained, and the government works with private companies in the economic philosophy of corporatism.”

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 often lapses into summary (rather than explanation). In paragraph 2, the response begins by making a comment related to “victimized minorities” and then provides evidence from source C, but it only restates the information from that source and provides an incomplete explanation of how the source information relates to the thesis: “Ultimately, families are displaced and the communal social fabric of poorer communities is broken.” Paragraph 3 provides more incomplete explanation, this time related to the role of corporatism in eminent domain as addressed in Source B. Taking the position that “promises are left unfulfilled so that, in the long run, more are harmed than helped,” but then going on to only explain that “Such an outcome is exemplified in Source B” and then summarizing the argument of the source. It does emerge from that summary with an effective comment on the “disapproval of corporatism” as it connects also to source E.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C. While it does attempt to contextualize the argument in different places – “eminent domain has frequently entrenched itself into American history” (paragraph 1) – it neither maintains this context throughout the response nor refers back to it by the end.

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Sample F

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, taking the clear position that “Eminent domain is productive [and] useful...” but it does not establish a line of reasoning, only creating an redundant extension of the already stated thesis in explaining that it “can open up opportunities for people, and it can benefit many people.”

Row B: 2/4

The response earned 2 points for row B because, while it does use information from three sources as evidence directly related to the thesis, the commentary that explains the evidence merely repeats and oversimplifies source information. In paragraph 2, the cited evidence from Sources A and B is essentially repeated in the commentary about creating “jobs and opportunities for people.” In paragraph 3, the response then barely moves from the idea established in the thesis and focused on in paragraph 2, that eminent domain “can open up opportunities for people” and on to the repetitive idea that “it can benefit many people.” Again, the response includes information from a source (D) – this time, a quote – and then provides no explanation of how that quote relates directly to the thesis.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C because there is no evidence of complex understanding of the topic or of the rhetorical situation.

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Sample A

2/6 Points (A0 - B2 - C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for row A because its intended thesis in paragraph 1 does not take a position, it merely presents a somewhat obvious binary choice – “eminent domain is good and bad depending on what side you stand on...” The prompt requires the student to take a position, but this response never goes beyond equivocation.

Row B: 2/4

The response earned 2 points for row B because, while the evidence provided relates to the subject of the prompt, the commentary that explains those connections oversimplifies and misinterprets the evidence. In paragraph 1, the response attempts to explain Source F – “If the government took his property their [sic] would be various causes of damage to his work.” – but oversimplifies that evidence and its presentation. The remainder of the response then proceeds to overgeneralize sources and state that those sources relate to the subject, but fail to draw on specific information from the sources or explain how those sources relate to the subject. It is important to note how this response is hampered by its lack of a thesis, meaning that any evidence introduced cannot be introduced in support of a thesis – a necessary trait to earn 3 or 4 points in Row B.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C because it does not demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the topic or of the rhetorical situation. Because the response misinterprets or oversimplifies its explanations, there are no examples of a complex understanding or a more sophisticated prose style.

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Sample C

1/6 Points (A1 - B0 - C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for row A because it provides a defensible thesis in paragraph 1: “The government utilizing Eminent Domain can be so helpful in many ways like considering better facilitates for transportation, better buildings, and better ways of supplying water.”

Row B: 0/4

The response did not earn any points for row B because, while it does appear to vaguely refer to some source material, those references may only be topical similarities and without any citations or attributions, it is too difficult to say. Also, it does not provide relevant explanation for these vague references and does not connect them to the thesis in any substantive way.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C because there is no evidence of complex understanding of the topic or of the rhetorical situation. The ideas and language do not reflect an understanding of context.

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Sample G

1/6 Points (A0 - B1 - C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for row A because the statement that approaches a thesis: "...many people are reluctant to agree that eminent domain is beneficial." is simply a summary of the issue and repeats the language of the prompt. It is never clearly stated what the student's position is, as can be seen with the concluding statement of the response "It's just a matter of preception [sic]."

Row B: 1/4

The response earned 1 point for row B because, although it does use three sources, it does not provide enough commentary to link it to the subject of the prompt. There are only a few brief phrases that refer to the quoted evidence such as "...in cases like Freetown, the benefits just seem to outway [sic]" therefore this example meets the criteria "provides little commentary".

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point for Row C because there is no evidence of complex understanding of the topic or of the rhetorical situation.