



**Student Performance Q&A:
2006 AP® English Literature and Composition
Free-Response Questions**

The following comments on the 2006 free-response questions for AP® English Literature and Composition were written by the Chief Reader, James E. Barcus of Baylor University in Waco, Texas. 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 performance 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.

Question 1

What was the intent of this question?

Students were asked to read carefully a poem, Robert Penn Warren's "Evening Hawk," and then to write a well-organized essay in which they identified the speaker's attitude toward the hawk and the natural world. In this essay, they were expected to analyze how the poet uses language to convey mood and meaning. The intent of this question was to assess students' abilities to read closely, paying attention to the resources of language used to convey the attitude of the speaker. To respond to the question successfully, students needed to have a firm grasp of the devices and techniques employed by poets and then to arrive at an analytical and defensible reading of the poem. Because this poem is allusive, rich, and challenging, most students were able to respond to it on some level, and the able students had many opportunities to demonstrate their skills.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for responses to this prompt was 4.27 out of a possible 9 points, slightly below the mean score of 4.67 in 2005, and the lowest mean of the three 2006 prompts. However, the prompt discriminated very well. That is, the ablest essays were nuanced and intelligent and contained analyses of the metaphorical and philosophical trajectories in the poem, whereas the less able managed to speak to the issues with various levels of precision. The question was sufficiently open to support a variety of responses from students, providing interesting reading experiences for the Readers.

Many students performed quite well, writing thoughtful essays on this difficult poem. Because the question was broadly cast, the most able students realized that they did not need to declare what the poem means in its entirety, but they could claim for themselves an analytical space and discuss how the poet uses language to convey meanings of a part, various parts, or the whole poem. Many students commented meaningfully on how Warren uses descriptive language to establish the setting and how figurative language is employed to convey the power and might of the hawk in flight at the close of day. In addition, many students discussed the poet's use of both literal and figurative language to establish the moods of the poem and how the mood moves from awesome wonderment to something darker and more ominous.

The best student readers, thinkers, and writers found the text profoundly rich and complex and produced well-organized essays that explored the relationships between language and thought in precise ways. Nevertheless, the lower-than-usual mean score suggests that teachers ought to provide additional experience in close reading (explication of the text). Many students were unable to move beyond noting that the poet employs metaphors or some other device and failed to make the connection between the vehicle and the thought.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Again this year, Readers were troubled by the number of students who appear to be untutored in close reading of poetic texts. Many students were not equipped to compose effective responses that employed an analysis of poetic techniques, especially since the prompt intentionally did not provide a possible laundry list of such devices. Too many students who could identify a metaphor or alliteration were unable to turn a list of techniques into an essay that showed how the devices contributed to the meaning of the poem. Readers noted the following problems:

- Students struggled with the simplest vocabulary words.
- Students failed to support their generalizations with specific references to the texts.
- Students emphasized a mechanical essay form, providing meaningless introductions and repetitious conclusions.
- Students have memorized lists of devices, sometimes even esoteric and sophisticated terms, but they were unable to integrate the lists into intelligent commentary.
- Students substituted summary or paraphrase for analysis.
- Students were unable to show how a technique they could identify (or sometimes misidentify) contributed to the meaning of the poem.
- Students were unable to discuss the rich ambiguity of the poem. Too many insisted on pursuing a Blakean "single vision" rather than analyzing the complexity of the language.
- Students sometimes failed to distinguish between literal and figurative uses of language.
- Many students were unable to construct an essay with a controlling idea.

These observations suggest that teachers must spend more class time engaged in reading, discussing, and analyzing poetry so that students become more skilled not only in understanding the mechanics of poetic language but in connecting language to meaning.

2006 AP ENGLISH LITERATURE SCORING GUIDELINE
Question #1: Robert Penn Warren's "Evening Hawk"

General Directions: This scoring guide will be useful for most of the essays that you read, but in problematic cases, please consult your table leader. The score that you assign should reflect your judgment of the quality of the essay as a whole—its content, its style, its mechanics. **Reward the writers for what they do well.** The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by one point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a three (3).

9-8 These essays offer a persuasive analysis of the language the poet uses to describe the scene and to convey mood and meaning. Although the writers of these essays offer a range of interpretations and choose to emphasize different poetic techniques, these papers provide convincing readings of the poem and demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the analysis of poetry. Their textual references are apt and specific. Though they may not be error-free, these essays are perceptive in their analysis and demonstrate writing that is clear and sophisticated, and in the case of a nine (9) essay, especially persuasive.

7-6 These competent essays offer a reasonable analysis of the language the poet uses to describe the scene and to convey mood and meaning. They are less thorough or less precise in their discussion of the themes and techniques, and their analysis of the relationship between the language and the themes is less convincing. These essays demonstrate the writer's ability to express ideas clearly with references to the text, although they do not exhibit the same level of effective writing as the 9-8 papers. While essays scored 7-6 are generally well written, those scored a seven (7) demonstrate more sophistication in both substance and style.

These essays may respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of the poem, but they may be superficial in analysis of theme and technique. They often rely on paraphrase, but paraphrase that contains some analysis, implicit or explicit. Their analysis of the language of the poem may be vague, formulaic, or inadequately supported by references to the text. There may be minor misinterpretations. These writers demonstrate control of language, but the writing may be marred by surface errors. These essays are not as well conceived, organized, or developed as 7-6 essays.

4-3 These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate analysis of the language of the poem. The analysis may be partial, unconvincing, or irrelevant. Evidence from the poem may be slight or misconstrued, or the essays may rely on paraphrase only. The writing often demonstrates a lack of control over the conventions of composition: inadequate development of ideas, accumulation of errors, or a focus that is unclear, inconsistent, or repetitive. Essays scored a three (3) may contain significant misreadings and/or demonstrate inept writing.

2-1 These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4-3 range. Although some attempt has been made to respond to the prompt, the writer's assertions are presented with little clarity, organization, or support from the poem. They may contain serious errors in grammar and mechanics. These essays may offer a complete misreading or be unacceptably brief. Essays scored a one (1) contain little coherent discussion of the poem.

0 These essays give a response with no more than a reference to the task.

— These essays are either left blank or are completely off-topic.

AP[®] Summer Institute Scoring Notes
2006 AP English Literature and Composition

Question 1

Sample Identifier: GGGG
Score: 9

- Though the student does not make a contrast between the activities of nature and the activities of man-seeing both as “metaphors to describe the inevitable and steady passage of time”—this essay provides a most convincing reading of the poem and supplies ample evidence to support this analysis
- The discussion perceptively views the rotation of the earth and history dripping like a “leaking pipe” as two concluding images that “best support the poem’s message of time’s passing”
- This example offers a persuasive analysis of the language the poet uses in “Evening Hawk,” such as the fact that the hawk’s motion is a “boned steel edge” and scythes down another day, “connoting images of sharpness”
- Skill with language is demonstrated by the fact that the student recognizes the first stanza as “one periodic sentence” and employs apt and sophisticated diction (“the sagacious Plato,” “the poem’s metaphors . . . implore readers to ponder the indiscriminate . . . passage of time”) to discuss this poem.

Sample Identifier: HHHH
Score: 8

- Some very sophisticated analysis of mood and meaning, supported by extensive quotations that are probed to get beneath the surface meaning. For example, “the description of the hawk as a reaper, with its wings as ‘scythes’ cutting down with ‘boned steel-edge’ the ‘stalks of time’ place the hawk as a precursor and cause of time’s march” demonstrates this student’s ability to weave the author’s language into a fluid, probing discussion
- This essay demonstrates effective control over the elements of composition, with an excellent introductory paragraph that leads to a precise thesis: “With strong imagery to set the stage, diction to create a dark mood, and comparative devices to convey meaning, Warren effectively utilizes language to portray the striking power of a hawk soaring at sunset.”
- While the discussion starts off very strong and continues in similar fashion for most of the essay, the writing dips slightly toward the end and keeps the essay from achieving the highest score point

Sample Identifier: I
Score: 7

- A very coherent discussion of the hawk as a “harbinger of what is to come” to the world. Through the sun “is soon setting on the World,” the student recognizes that the last stanza provides hope that “all is not lost,” that “we might just hear ‘history/Drip in darkness like a leaking pipe in the cellar.”
- Well written overview of the poem, using sophisticated diction and succinct phrasing
- Although not as fully developed as the top-tiered essays, this is a clear and insightful analysis
- Judiciously employs frequent references to the text to address how gloom gives way to hopefulness

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Sample Identifier: P
Score: 6

- The student is very observant regarding the various poetic devices at work in the poem, such as how the “alliteration of ‘guttural gorge’ emphasizes the scene by forcing readers to slow down as they read the line.”
- Though there is liberal quotation from the text, the analysis is often not fully developed and sometimes falls flat: “‘Human ‘history’ is meanwhile doomed in evil to ‘grind’ wretchedly in ‘shadow’ and ‘darkness.’” It would be useful to explore the implications of such assertions
- While the development might not be as full as we would like, the essay is coherent, and transitions are employed effectively so that the discussion flows smoothly.
- The brief conclusion helps keep the essay in the upper half by showing the student’s recognition of Warren’s use of extended metaphor and his “prediction for the fate of the human race through its contrast with the steadfastness of nature.”

Sample Identifier: BB
Score: 5

- Begins with a clear, concise introduction that establishes the thesis that “humans belong to only a small part of the world’s history”
- Nonetheless, the body of the essay is superficial, pointing out individual items, such the Warren’s use of “polysyllabic and concrete” diction without explaining the significance of these features
- Overall, the essay makes no systematic attempt at analysis, and this lack of effective organization keeps it from moving into the upper half

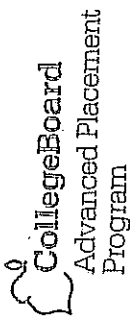
Sample Identifier: WWW
Score: 4

- Though the student seems to have a general understanding of the poem, there is ultimately a failure to focus on the direction the prompt tries to establish
- While there are a number of quotations from the text, there is little or no analysis of the ideas contained within these quotations
- The writing skills are generally good, though there is a fused sentence in the opening paragraph
- Ultimately, there is inadequate development of ideas to move the poem into the upper half

Sample Identifier: R
Score: 3

- The student attempts to satisfy the requirements of the prompt, but does not succeed at the task
- The essay discusses imagery, diction, and tone, but is unable to explain how they are used to convey mood and meaning

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- Analytical statements are so general that they could be used to describe almost any writing: "Through imagery we can take the situation Warren has painted and understand the scene."
- The student attempts to explain the significance of the hawk—"The hawk rides the light with immensity as if to reach heaven or some greater force"; "The hawk seems to be thriving [sic] for some attention or a greater force like heaven"—but does not support these assertions with specific references to the language of the poem

Sample Identifier: B

Score: 2

- This student writes in generalities
- There is almost no attention to the language of the poem and how it conveys mood and meaning
- Overall, the writing provides more of a summary of the poem than an analysis
- The student has only a limited understanding of the poem and, perhaps for this reason, chooses to make several disconnected claims, rather than to construct a methodical analysis
- The writing lacks sophistication and control: simple sentences; simple explanations ("tones of excitement create a sense of suspense"); problems of logic ("nature is steady and ever-changing") all contribute to an essay with assertions that lack the clarity and support needed to be persuasive

Sample Identifier: MMM

Score: 1

- Unacceptably brief response
- Some sentences are problematic, such as lacking a concluding phrase, notably the apparent thesis: "The author gives a tone of indifference to time while conveying the theme of . . ." Other sentences advance claims that seem very odd: "He personifies the world giving it manufacturing qualities", "He capitalizes [sic] Time and therefore [sic] making it a name."
- Overall, the essay presents little coherent discussion of the poem