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AP[®]



AP[®] English Language and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

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Rhetorical Analysis**6 points**

Michelle Obama was the First Lady of the United States during the presidential administration of her husband, Barack Obama (2009–2017). During that administration, she led programs including the Reach Higher Initiative, which encourages students to continue their education after high school. One way it does so is by supporting high school counselors' efforts to get students into college. On January 6, 2017, Obama gave her final speech as First Lady at an event honoring outstanding school counselors. The following passage is an excerpt from that speech. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the United States.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer's rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<p>Row A Thesis (0–1 points)</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>For any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no defensible thesis. The intended thesis only restates the prompt. The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. 	<p>1 point</p> <p>Responds to the prompt with a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only restate the prompt. Fail to address the rhetorical choices the writer of the passage makes. Describe or repeat the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 		<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt <u>and</u> clearly articulate a defensible thesis about the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the United States.
<p>Examples that do not earn this point:</p> <p>Restate the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“In 2017, then First Lady Michelle Obama delivered her final speech as First Lady at an event honoring school counselors.”</i> <p>Make a claim, but do not address the writer’s rhetorical choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“In her 2017 speech to school counselors, Michelle Obama set high expectations for her audience, the young people of America.”</i> <p>Repeat provided information from the passage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Michelle Obama claims in her speech that ‘our glorious diversity’ is what ‘makes us who we are.’”</i> 		<p>Examples that earn this point:</p> <p>Present a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Michelle Obama uses a friendly tone, inspirational diction, and examples from her own family to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in America.”</i> <i>“In her last speech as First Lady, Michelle Obama adopts the persona of a mentor or parental figure, using second person pronouns and giving direct advice, to inspire her audience of young people to ‘rise to their best possible selves.’”</i> <i>“In her inspirational 2017 speech, First Lady Michelle Obama provides multiple examples of her own family to exhort the young people in her audience with a call to action to take their place as positive and productive members of American society.”</i>
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. The thesis may be anywhere within the response. For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn’t do so to earn the thesis point. A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
<p>Row B</p> <p>Evidence AND Commentary (0–4 points)</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.</p>	<p>1 point</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument.</p>	<p>2 points</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Provides some specific, relevant evidence.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.</p>	<p>3 points</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Explains how at least one rhetorical choice in the passage contributes to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.</p>	<p>4 points</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Explains how multiple rhetorical choices in the passage contribute to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes					
<p>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. • May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to focus on summary or description of a passage rather than specific details or techniques. • Mention rhetorical choices with little or no explanation. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. • May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument. • May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim. • Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument. • Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims. • Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument. • Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained. • Explain how the writer’s use of rhetorical choices contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage. 	
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. • To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same rhetorical choice if each instance further contributes to the argument, purpose, or message of the passage. 					

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Sophistication (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to contextualize the text, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>In a world where . . .</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time . . .</i>”). • Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“<i>While some may argue that . . .</i>” OR “<i>Some people say . . .</i>”). • Examine individual rhetorical choices but do not examine the relationships among different choices throughout the text. • Oversimplify complexities in the text. • Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance their analysis. 	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explaining the significance or relevance of the writer’s rhetorical choices (given the rhetorical situation). 2. Explaining a purpose or function of the passage’s complexities or tensions. 3. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the argument, not merely a phrase or reference. 		

Sample 2A (1 of 1)

Former First Lady Michelle Obama was known for programs and projects that focused on the youth of the United States. Things that would help them become great citizens when they grow up. In her final speech as first lady, Obama uses repetition, emotional appeals and allusions to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the US.

Former first lady Obama expresses her message about her hopes and expectations for young people by using allusions and emotional appeals. For example, she alludes to the pilgrims' reason for coming to the new world in paragraph three when she discusses the tradition of American religious diversity. This allusion is important because it provides an explanation for why we have the freedom of religion and why America is so religiously diverse, because people came here as a fresh start to be away from religious persecution and to practice and believe in whatever they want to believe in. It's important because it explains to her audience of young people that they do not have to be afraid of what they believe in because those differing religions contribute to the makeup of the nation. It exemplifies that part of the rich diversity of the United States is religious diversity; it makes the citizens of this nation who they are and it's important because without the US wouldn't be what it is and the ideas and concepts that are shared wouldn't be shared if there was no religious diversity. Obama also uses emotional appeals when she says, "If your family didn't have much money, I want you to remember that in this country plenty of folks..... started out with very little." This appeal is important because it illustrates how not only is she relating to her audience but also how other people relate with them as well. Her use of appeal in this sentence shows the audience that they are not alone when it comes to things that there are many other people who go through the same things. It's important to her audience of young people who may believe that they are less than because it shows them that they can get just as far as she has. Which conveys her message because it provides her audience hope that no matter the situation with hard work they can do anything they put their minds to and achieve their goals.

Obama also uses repetition to convey her message as well. For example, when she says, "If you.." or "If your..." The use of repetition is important because it emphasizes all the different potential characteristics or circumstances people could be going through. The use of repetition is important because it shows how Obama appeals to everyone, how her message is for everyone not one particular group of people but everyone. Which is important to her audience of young people because young people often have thoughts and questions on whether or not something applies to them or if they are included or a part of something. The repetition shows to them that they are included that this message applies to them and that her hope and expectations for are applied to them. That she's extending that hope and those expectations to every young person out there. She also uses repetition of the word "you" throughout her speech. The repeating of the word you is important because it directs the speech back to the audience. It helps to convey the expectation part of her message. It emphasizes that as young people they are the next leaders, the next doctors, the next lawyers etc and emphasizes as they the next generation of leaders that they need to prepare themselves for the challenges ahead but still also be proponents of change. Be the people who fix things, discover new things and make the United States a more free, and just nation by being an engaged citizen. Another example of repetition she uses is the phrase, "the hope..". The repetition of this phrase is important because it extends hope and encouragement that they will actively try to make their communities a better place. The repetition of this phrase is important because it illustrates to her audience of young people the hope she has for them. It shows them that she hopes they carry on like their ancestors and the people before them in being people of positive change. It displays to them not only the kind of hope she has but that everyone should have, despite their title, status, or occupation. That everyone should have hope and be hopeful that they can be proponents of change in their communities and their nation.

Sample 2B (1 of 1)

A strong powerful woman gave a push to the future generation of America. First lady Michelle Obama gave a speech in her final days in administration to encourage students to continue their education after high school. While speaking to the students at their high school Michelle uses a call to action, and broad speaking to relate and push these students.

Michelle states in her speech "...This right isn't just handed to you..." she makes it very clear to these students that this "right" is not easy to come about and takes lots of hard work. She reminds them that you will fail and you cannot take freedoms for granted. But that you need to think of this journey now, you need to plan and make sure that you can be successful when it comes to that point in life. "And that means getting the best education possible..." she states telling them to get engaged with this American freedom; resulting in a good job, being able to support your family, and being a positive force, as she states in paragraph 5.

This first lady wants all students to feel as though they can have a higher education after high school. She never pinpoints one social group or is directly talking to them, making each students feel like they have a chance at success after grade school. She is friendly and keeps everyone in mind, Michelle relates to everyone, even people of many religions, telling them they too can continue their learning of values, "So I want our young people to continue to learn and practice those values with pride." No one should miss out on education in Michelle Obama's eyes.

Obstacles, problems, money issues and all these experiences can be faced throughout schooling. But Michelle Obama wants you to know that nothing is impossible, that every minority has the chance to have a higher life. She pushes us to take that step now to prepare and not let any problem at hand stop you from trying, all students deserve and should have a education after high school.

Sample 2C (1 of 1)

In her last speech, Michelle Obama uses comparing and contrasting to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the United States.

She compares and relates to her and her husband's life leading up to their spot in the White House to an ordinary citizen. She expresses how they started with very little and with very hard work and time, they were able to work their way up to becoming the President and First Lady of the United States, which is what the American Dream is all about. Many ordinary, and even poorer, United States citizens coming from all different backgrounds and religions can do what they did through hard work and education. She states, "If your family doesn't have much money, I want you to remember that in this country, plenty of folks, including me and my husband---we started out with very little. But with a lot of hard work and a good education, anything is possible---even becoming President. That's what the American Dream is all about." She compares to life to an average citizen's life to actively display how they are capable of doing exactly what her and her husband did, while trying to encourage those people to work hard to get there, putting in effort and continuing their education after high school.

Question 2

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain grammatical errors.

Overview

Students responding to this question were expected to read an excerpt from a 2017 speech delivered by Michelle Obama at an event honoring outstanding school counselors and then write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Obama made to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the United States. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the speaker’s rhetorical choices; select and use evidence to support their line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supports their line of reasoning; demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument.

As per the Course and Exam Description, students were expected to be able to read and understand the speech and identify the strategic choices Obama made related to the rhetorical situation, explain how those rhetorical choices contributed to the purpose of the address, identify and describe their claims, and analyze and select the appropriate evidence to support their claims.

Sample: 2A

Score: 1-3-1

Thesis (0–1) points: 1

The defensible thesis is the last sentence of paragraph 1: “In her final speech as first lady Obama uses repetition, emotional appeals and allusions to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the US.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. For instance, paragraph 2 includes several examples of how Obama acknowledges and appeals to the diversity of her audience (diversity of religion and economic background), and paragraph 3 explains several examples of ways in which Obama’s use of repetition “emphasizes all the different potential characteristics or circumstances people could be going through” and “illustrates to her audience of young people the hope she has for them.”

The response is organized in a line of reasoning that focuses on Obama’s awareness of and appeals to the audience through various rhetorical choices, building upon claims made in paragraph 2 to explain claims in paragraph 3. For example, the claim that Obama’s emotional appeal in paragraph 2 “shows the audience that they are not alone when it comes to things that there are many other people who go through the same things” is built upon in paragraph 3 with the explanation that Obama’s message “is important to her audience of young people because young people often have thoughts and questions on whether or not something applies to them or if they are included or a part of something.” While the discussion of the pilgrims and religious diversity in paragraph 2 demonstrates an understanding of the historical context from which the value of religious diversity in America comes, the commentary that follows—“it explains to her audience of young people that they do not have to be afraid of what they believe in because those differing religions contribute to the makeup of the nation”—does not clearly explain how Obama’s rhetorical choice to include the allusion effectively conveys her expectations and hope for young people in the United States.

Question 2 (continued)

Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The response demonstrates a complex understanding of Obama’s rhetorical situation and goes beyond repeating information included in the prompt, consistently connecting Obama’s speech to the past as well as the understanding that today’s words are meant to impact the future. The response offers a sophisticated understanding of why Obama includes specific references: “She alludes to the pilgrims reason for coming to the new world in paragraph three when she discusses the tradition of American religious diversity.” The response’s style is not particularly vivid or persuasive, but it does not suffer weaknesses in language control (despite consistent misspellings) that would interfere with the sophistication of the argument.

Sample: 2B

Score: 1-2-0

Thesis (0–1) points: 1

The defensible thesis appears in the last two sentences of paragraph 1: “First lady Michelle Obama gave a speech in her final days in administration to encourage students to continue their education after high school. While speaking to the students at their high school Michelle uses a call to action, and broad speaking to relate and push these students.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 2

While the response identifies two rhetorical choices—“call to action” and “broad speaking”—it relies more on restating Obama’s message than on offering commentary that explains how these two rhetorical choices help to convey that message, e.g., “She reminds them that you will fail and you cannot take freedoms for granted” (paragraph 2). The claim about inclusion in paragraph 3 is simplistic and repetitive: “She never pinpoints one social group or is directly talking to them ... She is friendly and keeps everyone in mind, Michelle relates to everyone, even people of many religions ... No one should miss out on education in Michelle Obama’s eyes.” Because the response does not explain any connections between the claims or connect them back to the stated rhetorical choices, no line of reasoning is clearly established.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not explore complexities or tensions within Obama’s argument, nor does it explain the significance of Obama’s rhetorical choices. Instead, the response borders on summary and oversimplification, e.g., “Michelle Obama wants you to know that nothing is impossible” and “This first lady wants all students to feel as though they can have a higher education after high school.” The style is not particularly vivid or persuasive.

Sample: 2C

Score: 1-1-0

Thesis (0–1) points: 1

The defensible thesis is found in the first sentence of the response: “In her last speech, Michelle Obama uses comparing and contrasting to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the United States.”

Question 2 (continued)

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

While the response identifies “comparing and contrasting” in paragraph 2 as a rhetorical choice, (e.g., comparing “her and her husband’s life leading up to their spot in the White House to an ordinary citizen”), it does not explain how the comparisons support Obama’s desire to improve educational opportunities. The response consists of mostly summary and description in paragraph 2 (e.g., “She expresses how they started with very little” and “She states, ‘If your family doesn’t have much money, I want you to remember that in this country, plenty of folks ... started out with very little’”) offering little or no explanation of the rhetorical choices Obama makes and how they convey her message.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

Because the response is largely descriptive, it does not explore complexities and tensions. The argument relies on one underdeveloped claim about comparison, so it does not display sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation. The style is neither vivid nor persuasive.