

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses

2018 AP English Language and Composition Free-Response Questions

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 question?

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.

Students provided many types of evidence—some historic, some literary, some cultural, and some personal. 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.

How well did the response address the question?

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.

How well did the response address the question?

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.

What common mistakes were seen in the responses?

Students define the unknown without stating a position of their own. Instead of providing evidence to support the claim, students repeated their claim via paraphrases.

From Mrs. Lee: General evidence instead of specific evidence.

“Technological advancements would not be possible if people were afraid of the unknown. We would not have phones and gadgets that are now common. Because of the unknown, society has technology and new things continue to be discovered every day. Technology becomes obsolete within a few years because people keep creating new things.”

“When Bill Gates dropped out of Harvard, he faced an unknown future because he chose an unconventional path to success – a path without precedence and filled with uncertainty. If Gates had not explored the unknown, he would not have built one of the largest global technology companies. Furthermore, Gates and his wife Melinda have used their wealth to fund major philanthropic efforts, such as building schools for impoverished children in third world countries. Gates not only achieved success for himself, he continues to discover new ways to improve the lives of people around the world. The impact of one man who chose to face the unknown is immeasurable.”

What are tips for approaching this essay?

Understand that the first step is to 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.

When students chose types of evidence as support for their position, they should focus on finding ways to articulate how the different pieces fit together. 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.

What are tips for approaching this essay?

Paraphrasing the claim in various ways is not evidence.

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.