
AP[®] English Language and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

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Free-Response Question 3

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Argument Essay

6 points

In a 2013 *New York Times* article on the practice of taking selfies, writer, editor, and podcast host J Wortham wrote: “Rather than dismissing the trend as a side effect of digital culture or a sad form of exhibitionism,¹ maybe we’re better off seeing selfies for what they are at their best—a kind of visual diary, a way to mark our short existence and hold it up to others as proof that we were here.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Wortham’s claim about the value of documenting one’s life with selfies is valid.

¹ behavior that is meant to attract attention to oneself

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
- Provide evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis (0–1 points)	0 points For any of the following: <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. 	1 point Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only restate the prompt. Do not take a position, or the position is vague or must be inferred. State an obvious fact rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 	Responses that earn this point: Respond to the prompt by taking a position on the extent to which Wortham’s claim about the value of documenting one’s life with selfies is valid, rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt. Clearly take a position rather than just stating that there are pros/cons.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Do not take a position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“In a New York Times article, J Wortham defends the practice of taking selfies.”</i> Address the topic of the prompt but are not defensible—it is an obvious fact stated as a claim <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Taking and posting selfies online is one of the most widespread phenomena of digital culture, but many people see this practice as a form of exhibitionism.”</i> 	Examples that earn this point: Present a defensible position that responds to the prompt. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“I agree that taking selfies does not necessarily mean that a person is merely seeking attention; selfies are a form of self-expression and communication.”</i> <i>“Wortham’s claim is partly true. While a quick look at any social media proves that many post selfies merely to show themselves off, such pictures can also help us capture and share memorable experiences.”</i> <i>“Wortham’s claim is valid; the person who takes a selfie in the twenty-first century is no more exhibitionist than the artist who painted a self-portrait in the nineteenth century.”</i>
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The thesis <i>may</i> be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. The thesis <i>may</i> be anywhere within the response. 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				
Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0–4 points)	0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the argument.	2 points EVIDENCE: Provides some specific, relevant evidence. AND 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.	3 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning.	4 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
	Typical responses that earn 0 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. May be just opinion with no evidence or evidence that is irrelevant. 	Typical responses that earn 1 point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tend to focus on summary of evidence rather than specific details. 	Typical responses that earn 2 points: <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. 	Typical responses that earn 3 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific details 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. 	Typical responses that earn 4 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific details 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.
Additional Notes: <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. 					

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 their argument, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (<i>“In a world where...” OR “Since the beginning of time...”</i>). Only hint at or suggest other arguments (<i>“While some may argue that...” OR “Some people say...”</i>). Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the argument. 	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"> Crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities or tensions. Articulating the implications or limitations of an argument (either the student’s argument or an argument related to the prompt) by situating it within a broader context. Making effective rhetorical choices that consistently strengthen the force and impact of the student’s argument. 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 student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference. 	

● Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

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Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Members of older generations ~~always~~ often ridicule younger ~~age~~ generations for their seemingly self-absorbed obsession with selfies. However, labeling these images as nothing more than ~~mere~~ expressions of ~~selfishness~~ narcissism and superficiality does not account for the immense value they also present. J Wortham's claim that selfies function as a "visual diary" ~~needed~~ speaks volumes on the worth of these pictures. Documenting one's life with selfies has historical value in ~~characterizing~~ providing future generations with depictions of life in a certain time period, as well as sentimental value in capturing the interpersonal relationships of those in the images.

To begin, there is significant historical value in characterizing a particular time period with selfies so that future historians can gain a greater understanding of how people lived during that ~~pe~~ time. Previous generations documented ~~how~~ their lives through ~~diaries~~ diary entries, describing their experiences with words. During WWII, teenager Anne Frank kept a diary about her experience hiding from Nazis, providing historians with insight about the common experiences of Jewish people during this time period. Frank also included ~~her~~ personal ~~anecdotes~~ anecdotes charged with emotion, similarly to the captions that can be left on selfies. ^{in present times} With the Snapchat app, users are able to capture pictures and overlay text descriptions. During significant historical events like the COVID-19 pandemic, teenagers, like Anne Frank, provided commentary on the

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frustration of mask-wearing and social distancing, along with the common boredom they experienced. These selfies will serve as ~~the~~ primary sources in future years, perhaps being studied like Anne Frank's diary. The digital culture of selfie-taking, therefore, has profound value as a source of historical documents that will help ~~researchers~~ clarify the 21st century to future historians. The perspective of the average person is more completely ~~more~~ preserved than in previous generations, since digital images ^{uploaded to social media or the cloud} are ~~are~~ easier to access than diaries, which can be damaged or lost easily. As time goes on, more historical turning points will undoubtedly be documented with the use of selfies, making the trend a valuable tool in the field of history.

Furthermore, selfies also contain ~~self~~ sentimental value because of their capability to immortalize interpersonal relationships beyond the lifespans of humans. Friends who want to create tokens of their time together on specific days can do so by taking a selfie together. Similarly, family ~~members~~ members often appear in digital selfies together. These images can be easily passed down from generation to generation more efficiently than flimsy paper pictures that are easily lost. The relationships of those captured in images is therefore manifested visibly for all to see. More than ever before, friendships are made permanent with their physical documentation. ~~Despite distance from one another or loss of a person~~ As a result of digital culture, there are more mementos of ~~the~~ interpersonal relationships. A person who lost their best friend no longer clings to the one image

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of them they have; instead, the photos app on their phone contains several records of their love for one another and the time they shared. The ease and reliability of selfie-taking leads to friends and family having ^{more} access to photos with each other than in the age of printed photos, demonstrating the value of selfies for sentimental reasons.

Although self image issues and obsession over one's appearance are consequences of the popularization of selfies, one cannot overlook the historical and sentimental benefits. People are able to document their conditions better than ever before, and interpersonal relationships are immortalized through selfies.

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In the age of digital development, many older generations question the need for constant phone usage and how it could be addition or a sad trend. Yet, phones and technology have served as an aid for humans and are able to perform in ways that are unique and special. Although some may argue that documenting one's life with selfies is silly and demonstrates ~~how~~ ^{scary} digital culture, the art of documentation will only continue to grow with the advancement of technology, serving as a ~~big~~ ^{proof} through the times.

J. Wortham claims that documenting one's life with selfies is a form of diary, which aligns with the notion that ~~that~~

documentation continues to grow and advance with technology. ~~But the classic feather and paper diaries were in usage. Then, as time advanced, that same feather and paper turned into a pen and paper, then into a stylus and tablet.~~

~~It was~~ In the late 1800's, the first camera was created, and although it didn't have the ability to take selfies or be portable, it was still used to capture memories. Now, thanks to big companies like Apple and Google, humans can perform the same act anywhere in the world.

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It's just one click. These two methods of capturing memories still procure the same message ~~are~~ - a mark of existence and the greatfulness of it. In the same way, the cloud can store these selfies ^(or anything digital) for years to come, which is a sure fire way to prove to generations of humans that the current ones today lived. ~~These~~ These selfies are evidence of civilization and development. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter if an old school camera or iPhone is used to capture a moment; all that matters is that the moment was captured and now marks proof and memories of a moment in time that won't be lost.

Some may argue that documenting one's life with selfies is meaningless and that it tugs on a deeper notion of reliance on digital items and AI. Admittedly, selfie taking has the chance to turn into an obsession which could lead to increased technology ~~usage~~ ~~addiction~~ ~~obsession~~. In the short story, "I have no mouth and I must scream," this idea is played with when a supercomputer takes over the world because humans relied on it too much to stop it. Although this exact scenario won't play out today, the big idea of obsession

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and reliance with technology is brought to light, and how such a thing can have major repercussions. However, the art of selfie taking is quite harmless and many people only take them when at a special occasion or with friends. In fact, selfie taking can foster connections with other people as they hand over their funny facial expressions or reminisce about a moment. It's even possible to say that selfie taking produces an environment in which people won't get obsessed with technology because they're too busy trying to create moments and bond with others before they can even take the picture. Thus, ~~documentation~~ ^{documentation} methods continue to develop with technology, playing hand in hand with fostering a visual diary, protected for years to come.

J. Wartham's claim about the value of selfie taking continues to prove the importance of creating memories and documenting them. As technology progresses, selfie taking methods will only advance until it may become something entirely different. At the end of the day, it's vital to remember that it's not the method in which the moment is captured but the moment itself is what's precious. ~~the selfie~~ ^{the selfie} ~~document~~ ^{document} will continue to serve in the diary of things, proving that humans lived, and that they'll remember it all.

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Although

Documentation of a person's life through "selfies", the act of taking a picture of yourself, ~~is a common way to document one's life~~ ~~can be used to document one's life~~ ~~is a common way to document one's life~~ is an effect of "digital culture", that does not discredit ~~the~~ value. ~~Selfies are~~ Documentation through selfies is extremely valid, as it can provide vital connections to be made between human beings, and even provides benefits to the justice system.

One example of selfies being vital to our interpersonal lives in a situation where someone has an illness that affects their memory. The use of a selfie, displayed to that person, can provide solace, no matter how brief, and grow ~~our~~ relationships, as the person with the disease can see memories with loved ones presented right before their eyes, once again, benefiting that person's well-being.

Another example would be the use of selfies for alibi in legal cases.

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Cell phones may provide a quick and easy way for humans to document their existence ~~and~~ which could be beneficial in a situation such as this; imagine someone is suspected of a crime, and evidence of their alibi needs to be provided. A selfie could qualify as valid evidence, and would save the suspect from their life being ruined through false imprisonment.

Use a pen with black or dark blue ink only. Do NOT write your name. Do NOT write outside the box.

Question 3

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

Overview

Students responding to the prompt were asked to develop a position on a 2013 quote by *New York Times* contributor J Wortham discussing the potential value of selfies and to write an argument on the extent to which Wortham’s claim about selfies is valid. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that presented a defensible position; provide evidence to support their line of reasoning; explain how their evidence supported a line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument.

As per the Course and Exam Description, students were expected to select evidence to develop and refine their claims, use appropriate approaches of organization and reasoning to support their arguments, and make stylistic choices that advance the argument.

Sample: 3A

Score: 1-4-1

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The defensible thesis is found in the final two sentences of the first paragraph: “J Wortham’s claim that selfies function as a ‘visual diary’ speaks volumes on the worth of these pictures. Documenting one’s life with selfies has historical value in providing future generations with depictions of life in a certain time period, as well as sentimental value in capturing the interpersonal relationships of those in the images.” This statement is defensible because it asserts that “Documenting one’s life with selfies has historical value ... as well as sentimental value.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The response uniformly offers evidence to support the claim that selfies have historical and sentimental value, including Anne Frank, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the hypothetical example of selfies capturing interpersonal relationships. Also, specific details are provided for each example to support all claims in a line of reasoning. This is seen in paragraph 3 when the response observes that digital images can “easily” and “efficiently” be passed between generations, additionally explaining that “The relationships of those captured in images is therefore manifested visibly for all to see.” The paragraph concludes with a clear summation of commentary that then reiterates the line of reasoning by saying, “The ease and reliability of selfie-taking leads to friends and family having more access to photos with each other than in the age of printed photos, demonstrating the value of selfies for sentimental reasons.”

The response consistently explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning stated in the thesis. Clear connections are made between the evidence and the claim through the commentary. While done consistently, a notable instance is when the response connects Anne Frank’s diary and the content posted by teenagers during COVID-19 explaining that “These selfies will serve as primary sources in future years, perhaps being studied like Anne Frank’s diary.” The response extends its explanation, not assuming that its comparison is self-evident and instead clearly explaining how the “perspective of the average person is more completely preserved than in previous generations, since digital images uploaded to social media or the cloud are easier to access than diaries,” making selfies

Question 3 (continued)

“a valuable tool in the field of history,” clearly explaining how the evidence supports the response’s line of reasoning.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The response earned the point for Row C for the interesting integration of Anne Frank’s Diary as a parallel to teens using selfies to document their COVID-19 experience. This positioning of selfies in the broader tradition of diarists as opposed to just digital content and/or social media creates a more sophisticated understanding of the rhetorical situation, which is to document and sentimentalize life. It is important to note that it is the commentary that explains the connection and not simply the inclusion of a well-known book that earns the point. The response does acknowledge a tension in the fourth paragraph when observing that, “self image issues and obsession over one’s appearance and consequences of the popularization of selfies,” is a real concern. However, this idea is not developed in a way that would earn the sophistication point.

Sample: 3B
Score: 1-3-1

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The defensible thesis is the final sentence of the first paragraph: “Although some may argue that documenting one’s life with selfies is silly and demonstrates scary digital culture, the art of documentation will only continue to grow with the advancement of technology, serving as proof through the times.” This statement is a defensible position.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

This response uniformly offers evidence to support the claim in each paragraph. The claims are supported by specific evidence, which includes the use of the camera in the 1800s to capture memories in the same way that “big companies like Apple and Google” allow us to record memories “with just one click” in the modern world. After comparing the camera to Apple and Google, the response explains that “These two methods of capturing memories still procure the same message—a mark of existence” and “are evidence of civilization and development.” This commentary connects the evidence to the claim “that the art of documentation will only continue to grow and advance with technology.” However, at times the commentary fails to integrate some evidence to support a key claim. Paragraph 3, for instance, incorporates discussion of a short story as evidence that seems to draw away from the main idea of the value of selfies, effectively failing to integrate some evidence or extend the line of reasoning.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The response earns the point in Row C for its recognition of a broader context, acknowledging both a historical basis for photographic documentation and common counterarguments about digital dependence. The response states that “many older generations question the need for constant phone usage” but notes that “phones and technology have served as an aid for humans” In both cases additional opportunities for developing these ideas exist, and enough is done to earn the point. While the response demonstrates competency in development, the style is not consistently vivid or persuasive.

Question 3 (continued)

Sample: 3C

Score: 1-2-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

In this response, the defensible thesis is the entire first paragraph: “Although Documentation of a person’s life through ‘selfies’, the act of taking a picture of yourself, is an effect of ‘digital culture’, that does not discredit its value. Documentation through selfies is extremely valid, as it can provide vital connections to be made between human beings, and even provides benefits to the justice system.” This is a defensible position because it asserts that being a part of digital culture “does not discredit its value” and that “Documentation through selfies is extremely valid.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 2

The response uses broad generalities to support the thesis, including “a situation where someone has an illness that effects their memory.” While hypothetical examples are not inherently poor evidence, the lack of specificity in this particular situation leads to the overgeneralized, simplistic commentary that a selfie “can provide solace, no matter how brief, and grow relationships.” The line of reasoning in this response is not clearly established because there is no connection of the evidence to the defensible thesis. Paragraph 3 introduces evidence that selfies can establish an “alibi in legal cases.” A hypothetical example is again provided, inviting the audience to “imagine someone is suspected of a crime, and evidence of their alibi needs to be provided,” but the lack of specificity invites the simplistic commentary that “A selfie could qualify as valid evidence, and would save the suspect from their life being ruined through false imprisonment.” While this does relate to the defensible thesis, it does not strengthen the argument.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

While the response explores multiple claims, it does not explore the complexities or tensions of this topic, keeping it from earning the point for Row C. The broad nature of the evidence provided means that the response’s rhetorical choices do not consistently strengthen the force and impact of the response’s argument. While competent, the style of the response is not consistently vivid or persuasive.