



**AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION  
COMMENTS FROM THE CHIEF READER ABOUT THE SAMPLE SYNTHESIS ESSAYS**

**General Characteristics of High-, Middle-, and Low-scoring  
Responses to the TV Debates Prompt**

***High-scoring essays***

These essays generally begin by contextualizing the issue at hand for readers, explaining to them briefly why educated, informed citizens ought to read on. Generally, the thesis in a high-scoring essay does justice to the complexity of the issue being considered while foregrounding the writer's position. In addition, these essays provide an extended consideration of the sources that they reference—they go beyond merely citing sources to assaying their significance to the thesis being developed and forging connections between the writer's position and that of the author of the source. Writers of the top essays enter into conversations with the sources that they choose rather than being overwhelmed by them. These essays attribute information gained from sources rather than simply appropriating this information. Finally, these best essays provide conclusions that do not merely summarize but address the “so what?” issue: How should educated, informed citizens continue to think about the issue at hand? How will it continue to influence the readers' lives?

***Middle-scoring essays***

These essays generally provide a relatively brief contextualizing statement that helps readers understand why they should engage with the issue at hand. They often present a strong thesis, but it is generally rather bald and straightforward and does not do much to accommodate the complexity of the issue. The writers quote source material and comment on it briefly in order to connect it to their thesis; they forge links between their own positions and those represented by the sources, but the links are often either very literal or strained. The conclusions tend to be a bit repetitive, often returning to language very similar to the thesis.

***Low-scoring essays***

These essays often seem overwhelmed by the sources. Rather than entering into conversation with other writers, these essays are dominated by them; they tend to leap directly into summarizing or describing the source material rather than contextualizing the issue at hand. The writers either have no recognizable thesis or a weak one that tends to become lost in their consideration of the sources. The essays generally either make rather slight reference to the sources and comment on them only obliquely or paraphrase the sources with little analysis. The sources are not always cited, making real synthesis (which requires acknowledging the ownership of ideas being examined) impossible. Occasionally the essays suggest that the writer misunderstands the sources; sometimes these essays incorporate large, directly-quoted excerpts from the sources with little or no commentary or explanation.