

**AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
SCORING COMMENTARY FOR THE SYNTHESIS ESSAY**

Sample: II
Score: 8

This essay effectively takes a position on the impact of television on the presidential elections and effectively synthesizes at least three sources to support this position. On the top of the second page, for instance, the writer notes how “the number of homes watching presidential debates sky-rocketed from 28.1 million in 1960 to 45.8 million in 1980 (Source D).” Through this citation the writer shows the ability to extrapolate from data on a chart to support a position and, further, shows the understanding that this information must be cited. In the same paragraph, the writer continues by using direct citation of Source A, positing, “While this ‘early promise’ (Source A) of television does easily align itself with democratic ideals, another important ideal, that of the people’s free choice whether or whether not to participate, has shown televisions [*sic*] less ‘promise’-ing aspects.” In each instance, the writer synthesizes—that is, combines the sources with the writer’s opinion to form a cohesive, supported argument—rather than just paraphrasing or quoting the sources. Each reference is clearly attributed. The language and development of the essay, though not without occasional error, are effective, and the writer’s position is supported with well-chosen examples (some of which are drawn from the writer’s own experience rather than the sources, which is perfectly acceptable). Overall, this essay is an effective response to the prompt.

Sample: S
Score: 7

This essay adequately responds to the topic but is characterized by fuller development than an essay that earns a score of 6. The writer develops a position on the effects of television on politics and synthesizes and cites three sources to support this opinion. The voice and development of the essay are more than just adequate, raising the essay from a score of 6 to that of 7, but the language and development are not effective enough to merit a score of 8. While most sources mentioned are cited, the first mention of Bill Clinton “discussing his underwear in a political campaign” is not cited, and so this is not an example of effective synthesis. Since papers are read as first drafts and rewarded for what they do well, this error is viewed in relation to the paper as a whole, in which the writer clearly demonstrates the ability to cite and synthesize source materials. The paper earned a score of 7 because it contains enough evidence of more-than-adequate synthesis (which includes correct citation), combined with a clear control of language.

Sample: F
Score: 6

This adequate essay synthesizes five sources in support of the qualified position that television has been good for presidential elections. Essays will be neither penalized nor rewarded for using more than three sources. This essay is scored a 6 because the thesis is adequately developed and the synthesized sources support this thesis. The writer’s use of historical examples in the introduction is appropriate and convincing. Although the essay maintains its focus, it does have some abrupt transitions. One example is the transition from the broad topic of television and the presidency to the narrow argument in the second paragraph that “Media program editors and producers can edit broadcasts to fit thier [*sic*] personal preference.” The third paragraph corrects for this error somewhat, with a transition that clearly shows how

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the writer is connecting the larger thesis to the narrower discussion of data gleaned from the chart in Source D. The discussion of Source E, while not wrong, is somewhat simplified by the writer's conclusion that news reporting "will make for a better president in general, because candidates will know that they should tell the whole truth all the time." These occasional clunky transitions and slight oversimplifications, however, do not detract from the overall adequacy of the sample. Because the essay never falls into unevenness or wanders from its topic, it is judged as adequate and scored a 6.

**Sample: BB
Score: 5**

The marker of a 5 essay is often its unevenness, a quality that distinguishes this sample. While the writer takes a position on the effects of television on presidential elections and uses three sources to support this position, the quality of the argument is uneven. On the top of page two, for example, the writer points out that in the aftermath of 9/11, "America was glued to its TV. By watching and listening, Americans from coast to coast felt involved in the tragedy. The same goes for politics; TV allows citizens to be involved and have a sense of 'direct contact.' (Campbell)." While Americans were likely "glued" to more than one "TV," the citation clearly supports the writer's position. A few sentences later, however, the writer states, "Personally as an American citizen, I like feeling as if I really know my president, not just as a formal relationship but rather more as a friend. TV is the way for Americans to reach that sense of comfort with their candidate [*sic*]. (Hart)." In this instance the writer oversimplifies the Hart source so much that the assertion is almost a misreading of Hart's much more complex argument. This wavering between valid and quasi-valid synthesis of sources in support of an argument kept this essay from earning a higher score; according to the scoring guidelines, "Essays earning a score of 5 ... support their position by synthesizing and citing at least three sources, but their arguments and their use of cited sources are somewhat limited, inconsistent, or uneven."

**Sample: G
Score: 4**

This essay is an inadequate response to the topic. The writer does attempt to develop the position that television has had a negative impact on presidential elections but oversimplifies both the argument and the three sources used to support it. While the sources are cited and are not simply paraphrased, the essay spends much of its time reporting on the sources rather than conceptualizing or interacting with them. When the essay does attempt to speculate based on information in the sources, the results are still problematic; the discussion of Source B ends with the logic that "By humiliating himself he [Clinton] feels [*sic*] closer to the public, which will help boost his image." While not completely wrong, this is a gross oversimplification of the issue. Transitions between paragraphs are abrupt and seem to occur when the writer moves on to discuss a new source rather than being controlled by movements in the writer's own argument. In this way, as the scoring guidelines for essays state, "The link between the argument and the sources is weak."

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Sample: HH

Score: 3

This sample earned a 3 because it met the descriptors of a 4 essay but was less insightful and well written than a 4 essay. As the scoring guidelines state, essays scored a 3 demonstrate “less understanding of the sources, less success in developing their own position, or less control of writing” than 4 essays. The writer inadequately takes a position on the impact of television on presidential elections and shows an inadequate understanding of the task by writing an essay that in part becomes a comparison/contrast of radio and television. While the writer does finally conclude that television has a negative impact on elections, this position is neither clear nor fully supported. The essay cites two sources and attempts to use them to support the thesis, but the connection between the sources and the argument is weak. The essay cites Source B about Bill Clinton in an attempt to link this source to an argument against the influence of television on presidential elections; the paragraph, however, concludes “For these reasons, radio is a much better medium in the world of politics.” This statement is oversimplified and does not take into account how radio targets niche audiences just as television does. The final paragraph mentions information gleaned from the graph without attributing this source, which is a flaw in a synthesis essay. The essay has numerous language problems and is not well developed, but it does attempt to synthesize two sources to support a position. The essay finally fits the descriptors for a 4 essay but demonstrates less success, earning it the score of 3.

Sample: X

Score: 2

This essay is, in many ways, insightful and well written enough to earn a score in the upper half of the range. This paper does not, however, synthesize any sources. Synthesis, as defined in the prompt, requires documentation of the sources cited. Instead, this paper is characterized by the description of the score of 2 from the scoring guide; it “merely allude[s] to knowledge gained from reading the sources rather than citing the sources themselves.” Alluding to or using knowledge taken from another source without acknowledging that source is plagiarism. Essays that do not acknowledge the sources that they use (directly, by naming the source in parentheses, or indirectly, by markers such as “As the graph [or photo, or article, etc.] shows”) will not be credited with having synthesized any sources. Had this paper directly or indirectly acknowledged the source of each reference, it could have earned a higher score.