Horace

“Adversity”
Overview

The AP Language & Composition exam’s argument essay is a free response question that asks students to respond to a moral or ethical debate using knowledge from their own observations, reading and experience. Good essays explore the dilemma and use specific evidence drawn from a range of categories to prove their argument.

Question Structure

*The question asks that the writer:*  
- “Solve” a moral or ethical dilemma  
- Adopt an argumentative position (i.e. defend challenge or qualify)  
- Employ evidence from reading, observations, knowledge, experience, etc.  
- Comment on how the evidence supports an original argument

Timing

- 40 minutes of writing

Expectations

- Original and Engaging Argument  
  - Determine your opinion on the topic and support it with specific evidence.
- Variety of Evidence  
  - Evidence can be drawn from a variety of sources. Think of specific examples within the following categories: history, literature, popular culture, current events, sports, scientific study/research, personal experience, etc.
- Analysis and Commentary  
  - Writing must discuss what the evidence represents, suggests, proves, etc. Explain how it supports a solution for the dilemma.
Deconstructing the Prompt

Each year the question is slightly different. Some past prompts have employed quotes or a short passage that highlights a moral issue. Other prompts have simply posed the dilemma in several short sentences. The format does not change the task. The writer always must construct an argument that uses their own knowledge to take a position on the topic.

2009 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant.

—Horace

Consider this quotation about adversity from the Roman poet Horace. Then write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Horace’s assertion about the role that adversity (financial or political hardship, danger, misfortune, etc.) plays in developing a person’s character. Support your argument with appropriate evidence from your reading, observation, or experience.

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Examining the Quotation

1. Horace argues that adversity elicits talent.
   - Explain what elicits means in this context.

   - Define “talent” within this context. What, specifically, might adversity create?

2. Horace also argues that without adversity those talents would have “lain dormant.”
   - Define lain dormant within this context.

3. Using your notes from above, paraphrase Horace’s quote in your own words.

Identifying Synonyms

1. Construct a list of synonyms for the word adversity.
Understanding the Task

It is important to understand the prompt’s task before constructing arguments and assembling evidence. Use the exercises below to examine the task specifically.

1. Examine the prompt’s task again. Then, construct your own paraphrase.

Then write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Horace’s assertion about the role that adversity (financial or political hardship, danger, misfortune, etc.) plays in developing a person’s character.

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2. Now, identify the explicit task. What are you being asked to do directly?

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3. Then, identify the implicit task. What implications must you examine in your writing?

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Constructing Argumentation

Before assembling your evidence, consider all aspects of the issue. Construct three different positions. Of the three, choose the one that best aligns with your point of view.

Defend- You support adversity’s role in impacting character.

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Challenge- You disagree with the argument that adversity impacts character.

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_____________________________________________________________________________

Qualify- You believe that sometimes adversity impacts character and sometimes it does not.

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**Assembling Evidence**

Consider the types of evidence useful for answering the prompt. This chart is divided into categories of knowledge. Do your best to identify evidence for each category. Evidence must defend, challenge, or qualify Horace’s assertion that adversity shapes character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History, Literature</th>
<th>Summarize the Evidence</th>
<th>Link to the Prompt</th>
<th>Identify the Implicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name the example specifically.</td>
<td>Explain the example. Be brief.</td>
<td>Explain how the example relates to the prompt. Be thoughtful.</td>
<td>Explain what this specific example implies about culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Events, Politics, Science, Technology, etc.</td>
<td>Summarize the Evidence</td>
<td>Link to the Prompt</td>
<td>Identify the Implicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name the example specifically.</td>
<td>Explain the example. Be brief.</td>
<td>Explain how the example relates to the prompt. Be thoughtful.</td>
<td>Explain what this specific example implies about culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Culture, Sports</td>
<td>Summarize the Evidence</td>
<td>Link to the Prompt</td>
<td>Identify the Implicit</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experience</td>
<td>Summarize the Evidence</td>
<td>Link to the Prompt</td>
<td>Identify the Implicit</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organizing the Argument

Use your draft thesis statements and the evidence from the previous pages. Then, construct an introductory and first body paragraph.

Writing the Introduction

The introduction to the paper is your opportunity to capture the reader’s attention, to give some general information about the subject, and to provide the “road map” for your essay—your thesis statement.

Below are some strategies that you might use to begin your introductory paragraph.
- a short anecdote that deals with the “big idea” of your argument
- a concession
- an interesting or controversial fact or statistic
- a question or several questions that will be answered in your argument
- relevant background material
- an analogy or image that you can sustain (revisit) throughout the argument
- a definition of a term or idea that is central to your argument

Introductory Paragraph—Be sure to engage the audience. Beware of restating the prompt.
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Writing the Body Paragraphs

Organizing your body paragraphs around an idea or an argument allows you to approach the prompt in a more sophisticated manner. Appropriately pairing evidence that helps support the focus of your body paragraph proves that you can see complexity. Remember, you are trying to suggest that your evidence has merit in the way that it relates to the prompt. You are also trying to organize your paragraphs around pieces of evidence that complement each other either.

Consider using the format below to organize your body paragraphs.

- **Topic Sentence**
  - Focus on a major idea or argument.
- **Specific Evidence-Example #1**
  - Briefly discuss your evidence in order to establish context.
- **Analysis (2-3 sentences)**
  - Link the evidence to the prompt.
  - Explain how the evidence is representative of a cultural or social value.
- **Transition**
  - Cohesively transition from your first piece of evidence to your second.
- **Specific Evidence-Example #2**
  - Briefly discuss your evidence in order to establish context.
- **Analysis (2-3 sentences)**
  - Link the evidence to the prompt.
  - Explain how the evidence is representative of a cultural or social value.
- **Concluding Sentence**
  - Explain the importance of your perspective in this body paragraph.
  - Remind your audience of what is “at stake” in the examples discussed.

Having a cohesive body paragraph requires that you do more than summarize. Consider how your evidence is representative of larger cultural issues. High scoring essays will linger over the meaning behind the evidence.

Practice the format on the following page. Use the evidence you collected from the chart. Determine which two pieces of evidence are best suited to complement one another in your first body paragraph.
First Body Paragraph

Take a position and explain how evidence supports the prompt. Be sure to reference the evidence collection chart. Complete the self-evaluation when you are finished.

Topic Sentence: _________________________________________________________________

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Evidence #1: __________________________________________________________________

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Analysis: ___________________________________________________________________

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Transition: ___________________________________________________________________

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Evidence #2: __________________________________________________________________

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Analysis:

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Concluding Sentence: ________________________________________________

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Identifying Areas of Improvement

Use the self-evaluation to construct a meaningful reflection of your writing.

_____ Vague thesis statement.
_____ Could not come up with a “hook” or introductory sentence(s)
_____ Thin body paragraphs
   _____ Could not establish an argument statement
   _____ Summarized the evidence
   _____ Did not establish a clear link between evidence and the prompt
_____ Other:__________________________________

Improvement Plan

Choose the two largest problem areas and describe how you can improve them. Be specific.

Focus Area #1______________________________
Improvement:___________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Focus Area #1______________________________
Improvement:_________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Student Sample

A complete student sample is provided below. Read and annotate for pros and cons.

Hard times make people stronger. Roman poet Horace states that “Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant.” From personal experience as well as from reading the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck I absolutely agree with this statement.

Spoiled children never learn how to do anything themselves. I have a few friends that are extremely spoiled and never work for what they receive. Their parents pay for cleaners to clean their room and they get brand new cars for their 16th birthdays. One friend in particular has been struggling lately. Her mother has recently become ill and she has been forced to take care of her siblings. Her father is always working, therefore, she is expected to drive everywhere and make dinner. Through her mother’s sickness she has been able to see how much she truly loves her family. She has also realized that she loves cooking. She loves making food and getting a great result. Had it not been for the difficult time she would have never realized her talent for cooking and her love for her family.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is an extremely touching book that shows the difficulty of life in the 1930s. In this book there is young woman named Rose of Sharon who miscarries her baby due to lack of healthy food during the Depression. She was absolutely crushed that her baby had died but through this experience she became stronger. She was able to grow up and mature much more quickly then she would have had it not been for her miscarriage. She was able to save a poor man from dying with her breast milk despite her insecurities. She had a talent for helping people. She possessed an extreme nurturing nature that would never have been discovered had it not been for adversity.

People are spoiled and need to experience adversity in order to be compassionate and caring individuals. People are most vulnerable and most receptive when enduring difficult circumstances. Adversity is a part of life that everyone deals with one time or another. It may not be fun at the moment, but looking back lessons were learned and talents were discovered. (369 words)
College Board Commentary

Score: 6

This essay adequately defends Horace’s assertion about the role adversity plays in developing a person’s character with a pair of appropriate examples, each accompanied by sufficient explanation. The student opens with an unambiguous, albeit somewhat pedestrian, thesis and defends it with two body paragraphs. The first starts with a defense of Horace’s claim that prosperous circumstances do not elicit talent (“I have a few friends that are extremely spoiled”) that is quick and somewhat superficial but adequate. It then presents the example of “[o]ne friend in particular” and illustrates how the student witnessed adversity eliciting talent when a friend discovered she could cook only after her mother became ill. The second body paragraph, in which the student draws on reading and explains how adversity brings out talent in The Grapes of Wrath, is happily more developed than the first. The student works harder to tie the evidence to Horace, offering a serviceable explanation that Rose of Sharon “was able to grow up and mature much more quickly than she would have had it not been for her miscarriage.” The prose contains lapses in syntax as well as diction, but it remains generally clear, and it adequately expresses the student’s ideas without confusion. In the final sentence of The Grapes of Wrath paragraph (“She possessed an extreme nurturing nature that would never have been discovered had it not been for adversity”) and the brief conclusion, the student shows an adequate understanding of the role adversity played in developing each girl’s character, which is what the prompt asked students to do.