

CHAPTER 13

The Free-Response Section

FREE-RESPONSE STRATEGY

Section II Overview

The 1 hour and 40 minute free-response section is worth half of your total exam score and consists of 4 questions, all of which are required. You should devote about 20 minutes to each of the first 3 questions, which will ask you to write short responses to questions relating to a stimulus. You should plan to spend about 40 minutes on the final prompt, which will lay out specific criteria you must meet when constructing a longer essay with a thesis.

✓ AP Expert Note

Treat the free-response section as a marathon (and train accordingly)

100 minutes can feel like no time at all when you have to write 4 free-response questions, but it is actually a long time for your brain to maintain sharp focus—especially after you have already spent 80 minutes on the multiple-choice part of the exam (Section I). However, if you practice writing free-response questions, including sticking to the timing and pacing required for Section II, you will build up the necessary stamina and feel much more prepared and confident on the official exam.

Question Types

Every AP U.S. Government and Politics exam will contain the same four free-response question (FRQ) types, always in the following order:

1. **Concept Application:** Apply government and politics concepts to a scenario described in a paragraph.
2. **Quantitative Analysis:** Interpret data from an information graphic, and apply the data to government and politics concepts.
3. **SCOTUS Comparison:** Compare a provided description of a non-required Supreme Court case to a required Supreme Court case.

4. **Argument Essay:** Construct an essay with a thesis, support it with evidence, and respond to a view that opposes the thesis.

Most free-response prompts will contain three or four tasks (labeled A, B, C, D). Although each type of question is distinct, they share some common characteristics. Often, a question draws from two or more areas in the course; for instance, the prompt may ask you to relate the topic of government bureaucracy to the topics of public policy and voting patterns. The free-response questions are also often structured to ask progressively more challenging tasks that will help you think through the prompt and build your answer. For example, Part A of the question may ask you to simply identify a trend based on data provided, Part B to describe the historic precedents for this trend, and Part C to explain how this information would apply to a present-day scenario.

Scoring

Readers will score each individual prompt according to a rubric. The rubrics for the Concept Application, Quantitative Analysis, and SCOTUS Comparison questions are straightforward: if a prompt requires you to complete five tasks, you can earn one point for successfully completing each task, for a total of five points for that prompt. The rubric for the Argument Essay is a bit more complex and relates to demonstrating certain skills, such as thesis construction and use of evidence. (Scoring information and sample rubrics will be provided in the following sections about each specific question type.)

✓ AP Expert Note

Keep in mind that each free-response question is weighted equally

Although the first three prompts might include varying numbers of tasks, and the Argument Essay will take you more time to write, each free-response question is worth the same amount: one quarter of your Section II score. Section II, as a whole, counts for half of your overall exam score. This means that each free-response question is worth 12.5% of your total exam score! Therefore, it is important to take every question seriously and respond to each one fully.

The Kaplan Method for Free-Response Questions

While there are four different kinds of free-response questions on the AP U.S. Government and Politics exam, you can and should approach every prompt using the same Kaplan Method. Employing a methodical, strategic approach will help ensure that you effectively address every part of every question. Just follow these four steps (which spell out AP-AP)!

1. **Analyze the prompt.**
2. **Plan your response.**
3. **Action! Write your response.**
4. **Proofread.**

Let's look at the Kaplan Method steps in more detail.

Step 1: Analyze the Prompt

Take the time to understand each and every part of the prompt. If you don't answer each of the prompt's required tasks, it will be impossible to earn a high score for that question! Analyzing the prompt means thinking carefully about the following components.

- **The stimulus.** The first three prompts will all include a stimulus, paragraph(s) or an information graphic that serves as the base of the questions that follow. Whether text or visual, analyze the stimulus just as carefully as you do the questions themselves. Take notes, underline key facts, and mark data trends. Most of the questions will be based directly on information from the stimulus, so it is essential to fully understand the stimulus.
- **The content of the questions.** Consider exactly what topics the questions address. Underline key terms and requirements. Some prompt parts might ask for more than one item—perhaps a “similarity” and a “conclusion based on the similarity”—so make sure you address them all. Read all the questions before starting work on your responses; often, the questions ask for related information or build upon each other, so understanding the set as a whole will help you plan out your response.
- **The action words.** Next, make sure you know exactly what you have to do with the content: *identify*, *explain*, etc. Consider circling the action words so you make sure you do the correct required action, noting especially when prompts ask you to do more than one. While we often use these action words somewhat interchangeably when speaking, consider carefully how each action word calls for a slightly different treatment of the content. Some examples, from simple to complicated, include:
 - *identify*: point out a trend or piece of information
 - *describe*: fully lay out the details of something
 - *explain*: describe something, including *why* or *how* factors (e.g., what causes it, why it's important)
 - *analyze*: explain something, considering multiple perspectives, and assert a claim based on evidence and logic

So before doing anything else, take a few minutes to analyze the prompt's stimulus, question content, and action words. You must have this foundation to successfully answer any free-response prompt.

✓ AP Expert Note

Know commonly tested free-response question topics

At least one of the four free-response questions on every AP U.S. Government and Politics exam will include the topic of public policy. While prepping for the exam, consider brainstorming ways that the branches of government, the public, and linkage institutions can each influence the creation of public policy. (For example, the president could issue an executive order regarding policy; interest groups could lobby Congress to make a law about a policy.) Other highly tested free-response question topics include federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and political behaviors.

Step 2: Plan Your Response

This is the *most important* factor in writing a quality response. Planning is never a waste of time; rather, it is a crucial step to creating an effective response that addresses every part of every prompt. The test makers expect you to take time to plan your responses and have built this into the exam timing, so take advantage of it. Ultimately, planning saves you time by helping you write a focused response. You only have time to write each response once, so make it count!

Here are some tips to help you make your plan:

- Think about what you will write for each part of each prompt. Jot down brief notes—phrases and/or examples—for each part.
- When asked to *describe*, *discuss*, or *explain*, see if you can come up with an example to help support your response.
- Double check your notes against the prompt to make sure you didn't skip any required tasks.
- Devote an appropriate amount of time to each part, depending on the complexity of the required task. (Parts that only ask you to *identify* something will require less time than parts that ask you to *explain* or *describe*.)

Step 3: Action! Write Your Response

After thoroughly completing the pre-writing steps, actually writing the response should be relatively easy: just use the notes you jotted down in Step 2 to write your paragraphs. You may choose to label your paragraphs according to the part of the prompt they address (A, B, C) in order to stay organized, but you don't have to. The most important thing is to make sure to write full paragraphs; lists or outline-style notes will not earn you points on the exam.

General writing strategies were laid out in Chapter 2, but overall, keep in mind that your responses should clearly focus on the required tasks, provide full explanations, and firmly assert your points.

 **AP Expert Note****Be strategic with the information you provide**

Don't just write as much as you know about the topic of a prompt; rather, respond with information that satisfies each specific requirement. For example, if a free-response prompt asks you to "identify the principle established in *Marbury v. Madison*," don't waste time explaining all the facts of this complicated case. Just write enough to identify that the case established judicial review, and move on!

Step 4: Proofread

Try to leave a minute or two to briskly proofread. Your responses need not be perfect, but you should quickly correct any glaring errors that might distract your readers from your content. If you catch a mistake, just neatly cross it out and write the correction above. Try to avoid erasures or other potentially messy alterations. There's no time for a complete overhaul of the response, but if you made a plan, there won't be any need for one!

A Note on Timing and Pacing

Now that we've established the Kaplan Method (AP-AP) to apply to every free-response question, let's review timing considerations. You should respond to each prompt for an amount of time that is proportional to the work involved. Prompts 1–3 should each take approximately 20 minutes to analyze, plan, write, and proofread, while Prompt 4 is a longer essay that should take 40 minutes for all of those same steps.

You are working over a long total time span, 1 hour and 40 minutes, so pacing yourself among four prompts will require some effort and practice. Consider wearing a standard wristwatch to help pace yourself in case there is no clock available in the testing room. And just as importantly, practice the free-response sections on the practice tests under timed conditions. It's easy to overestimate how long 1 hour and 40 minutes will feel on the day of the exam, so practicing an entire free-response section with a watch will greatly increase your familiarity with the required pacing.

One final reminder about pacing: although your time should be appropriately allotted among the four prompts, you do not necessarily have to respond to the prompts in order. As long as you write within the correct area of your lined booklet, feel free to start with whichever prompt is easiest for you to help build your confidence to complete the whole section.

✓ AP Expert Note

Remember to “AP-AP”

Recall that the steps of the Kaplan Method for Free-Response Questions spell out AP-AP. Follow all of the steps of this easy-to-remember acronym every time you encounter a free-response prompt, both in practice and on Test Day. By making the Kaplan Method second nature, you won't have to think about what you're doing, and can instead focus on the quality content you're writing.

CONCEPT APPLICATION

Overview

Question 1 of the free-response section will always be the Concept Application prompt. This prompt will begin with a stimulus that is a short paragraph or two describing a political scenario. The paragraph(s) could be an excerpt from news media, a description of a political situation, a summary of information, or something else.

The questions that follow the stimulus require you to apply course concepts to the given scenario. For instance, you could be asked how different branches of government might respond to the scenario, or how a conservative or liberal viewpoint might impact someone's support of or opposition to the scenario. Whatever you're asked, you'll need both a careful understanding of the prompt and your knowledge of government and politics concepts to tackle the Concept Application question.

Strategy

As you will for every free-response question, follow the 4-Step Kaplan Method. Before walking through a sample prompt step-by-step, let's look at some special considerations for the Concept Application question.

- When analyzing the stimulus, carefully note relevant details. Paraphrase the political scenario in your own words before looking at the questions.
- Concept Application questions often build on each other, asking you to use your response for one part to answer another part. Therefore, carefully plan your response before you start writing in order to make sure you choose answers that you can apply to later parts of the prompt if needed.

The following is a step-by-step walk-through of a sample Concept Application question.

Sample Question

A new political party, the Health & Wealth Party, forms to focus on those policies which members believe will address the most significant threats to the health and prosperity of the general population. Their key platform favors requiring manufacturers of high-sugar snack foods to produce an equal ratio of low-sugar snack alternatives offered at the same price to consumers. In addition, they advocate using tax money to subsidize low-income families with funds to buy the low-sugar snacks. To increase “wealth,” the party supports significantly lowering taxes on corporations, with the intent of attracting new businesses to the United States. Finally, they also propose drastically reducing income taxes for all Americans, making up the difference in the budget by slashing military spending for foreign affairs.

After reading the scenario, respond to Parts A, B, and C.

- (A) The Health & Wealth Party’s platform contains elements that reflect conservative, liberal, and libertarian viewpoints. For each of the three viewpoints, identify one element of the Health & Wealth Party platform that reflects that viewpoint’s typical ideology.
- (B) Describe a way in which the Health & Wealth Party’s nominee, if elected to the presidency, could attempt to implement the policy regulating snack manufacturers.
- (C) Explain one reason why it is difficult for third-party candidates, like the Health & Wealth Party nominee, to win presidential elections.

Step 1: Analyze the Prompt

Closely read the political scenario (the stimulus), marking important details. When finished, briefly paraphrase the paragraph in your own words, either in your head or in the margins, to solidify your understanding of the scenario before reading the questions. A sample paraphrase for this prompt could be: *Party for regulating snack companies, but otherwise supporting businesses, and lowering taxes & foreign military spending.* Note that on a detail-heavy scenario such as this, it is especially important to paraphrase the paragraph.

As you did with the stimulus, read all the questions carefully, underlining exactly what each asks for. Box, underline, or otherwise mark the action words in each question (which, for this sample prompt, are *identify*, *describe*, and *explain*). Make sure to respond in a way that fulfills what each action word requires.

Part 3 Comprehensive Review

Step 2: Plan Your Response

The following showcases a high-scoring writer's thought process and written notes for planning a response to this prompt.

Part A: Need to ID a detail for each of the three views.

- *Conserv.: traditional values + pro-market policies --> lower taxes on business*
- *Liberal: more gov't involvement for equality --> regulate manuf. & subsidies for poor*
- *Libert.: ind. liberty + low gov't involvement --> lower income taxes & military spending*

Part B: Need to think of how a pres. could impact a policy about reg. snack manufacturers, including details to describe my answer.

- *Commerce clause is relevant*
- *Pres. could meet w/ Congress, persuade to make committee & draft bill*
- *Pres. could endorse candidates who agree on issue*

Part C: Need to think about difficulties faced by third-party candidates during elections (not while in office). Need to fully describe the issue, including the why/how, to count as explaining.

- *Hard to win votes in electoral college due to winner-take-all system and entrenchment of major parties*
- *But an election based only on popular vote would likely not create a clear majority winner*

Step 3: Action! Write Your Response

Now you'll just write out the information you planned! As you write, remember to keep your paragraphs organized and your writing legible. Refer back to the question's action words to make sure you're doing the correct tasks. See the sample high-scoring response and the explanation of what features make it high-scoring at the end of this section. One of the best ways to improve your own free-response answers is to read sample responses, thinking carefully about what makes the responses effective and what features you can copy.

Step 4: Proofread

Leave a minute or so for a quick proofread, neatly correcting any errors you catch.

Sample High-Scoring Response

Parts of the Health & Wealth Party's platform reflect different political ideologies. Their stance on lowering taxes for businesses is a conservative view, as it reflects less government involvement in the economy. The plank about increased regulation of snack manufacturers, however, is a more liberal view about regulating the economy. The goal of lowering overall taxes and foreign military spending reflects a libertarian preference for less government.

The party's goal of regulating snack manufacturers could be addressed by a president. Since regulating a food company would likely fall under Congress's authority due to the commerce clause, the president could try to influence Congress. For instance, the president could formally and informally meet with Congress members to persuade them to draft a relevant bill, encourage (or pressure) them to call a special committee to research the issue, and try to influence the committees that handle health and nutrition. In addition, the president could endorse candidates who agree with the regulations during the midterm elections to get agreeable Congress members working on the policy.

However, a third-party candidate winning the Electoral College would be very difficult in our current two-party system. Since most states have a purely winner-take-all system for electoral votes, a third-party candidate would have to beat out both major party candidates in order to earn any electoral votes in a state. And even if a candidate did win a few states' electoral votes, he or she would still be far from winning the required 270 electoral votes to become president. Still, using a majority of popular votes to win the presidency would also be problematic: with 3 or more candidates running, it would be unlikely that any candidate would win the majority of votes. So, the winner-take-all system might be practical, even if it creates a challenge for third-party candidates.

Sample Response Explanation

The writer of this high-scoring response includes many effective elements:

- **Organization:** The response addresses one part in each paragraph. Although this is not required, it makes it much easier for the reader to follow and score your response.
- **Sentences:** Although Part A requires only identification, the writer still uses a paragraph for the response, adding just a little explanation to justify his or her classifications of the party planks. Use paragraphs and complete sentences for all parts of your responses; never use just phrases or lists.
- **Addressing each action word:** Note that the responses for Parts B and C are longer than the response for Part A. Part A only required *identification*, while B required *description* and C required *explanation*. The response for Part B provides a full description of a presidential action. The response for Part C effectively *explains* by discussing multiple reasons why the Electoral College is the way it is, including both how the system puts third-party candidates at a disadvantage and why the system is still practical.

Part 3 Comprehensive Review

Scoring for Question 1: 3 points (1 + 1 + 1)

The following is a general rubric an AP reader might use to grade this free-response question. When you practice FRQs, use both the sample responses and this scoring information to assess your own writing.

Part A (1 point)

One point for identifying a component of the platform for each view: conservative, liberal, and libertarian. Note: Some components could fall under more than one label.

- Example conservative components: lowering taxes on businesses, lowering income taxes, seeking more balanced budget
- Example liberal components: regulating snack manufacturers, providing subsidies for lower-income families, lowering military spending
- Example libertarian components: lowering taxes on businesses, lowering income taxes, lowering foreign military spending, seeking more balanced budget

Part B (1 point)

One point for describing a way the president could impact policy.

- Example ways include: calling a special committee/commission to research and influence the issue, persuading Congress members to create legislation that addresses the policy, appointing positions to the Food and Drug Administration that support the policy, issuing an executive order to the FDA, endorsing candidates who support the policy, using the “bully pulpit” to rally public support and put pressure on Congress, highlighting the issue in the State of the Union address, proposing a budget that includes provisions for the policy, threatening to veto a bill unless Congress makes provisions for the policy

Part C (1 point)

One point for explaining a difficulty faced by third-party candidates.

- Example difficulties include: less financing, difficulty of getting onto ballots, heavy political entrenchment of the two-party system, winner-take-all nature of Electoral College makes it difficult to score electoral votes, voter discouragement (wanting to make sure their vote “counts”), major parties’ tendency to adopt platform planks that try to appeal to potential third-party voters

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Overview

Question 2 is the Quantitative Analysis prompt. This FRQ begins with an information graphic, such as a table, chart, graph, or map. The information graphic will depict some kind of politically relevant data—presidential election results, political affiliations of federal judges, or voter turnout by state, for instance.

The prompts that follow will require you to both analyze the information graphic and relate its data to government and politics concepts; later parts will likely require increasingly complex tasks.

- Part A usually asks you to *identify* a piece of data or a trend from the information graphic.
- Part B will likely ask you to *analyze* the information graphic, perhaps by explaining a possible reason for the graphic’s data trends or by using the data to draw a conclusion.
- Part C will then involve *applying* the information graphic to a course concept; for example, the question could ask how a table’s depiction of popular vote results in a presidential election reflects the structure of the Electoral College system.

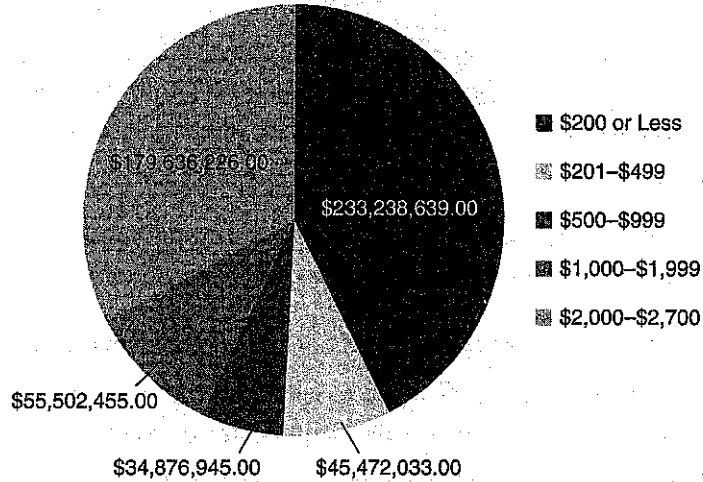
Strategy

As always, follow the 4-Step Kaplan Method. Also, consider the following special strategies for the Quantitative Comparison question:

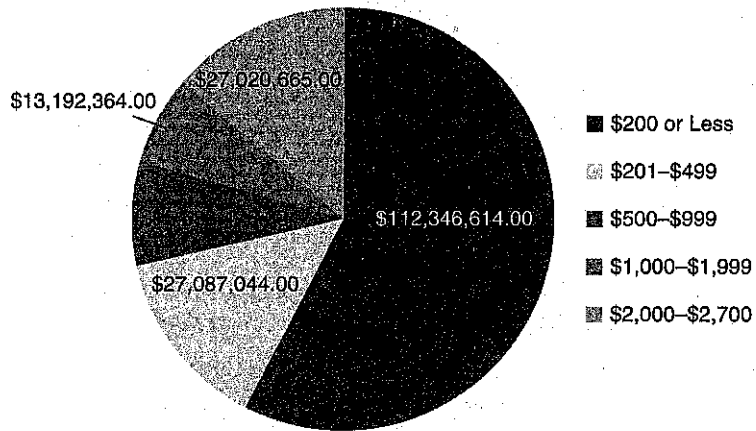
- Take time to analyze the information graphic. The information graphic is just as important to answering the questions as the text stimulus on other prompts, and it requires some special analysis. Components such as titles, labels, and keys are vital for correct interpretation of the graphic. Ask yourself exactly what data the information graphic is depicting (and what data it is *not* depicting) and note relevant trends before you look at the questions.
- At least one question will require you to identify a specific trend or data point from the information graphic. On such questions, focus only on the relevant part of the graphic and pinpoint the data you need.
- When appropriate, refer to data from the information graphic in your response, and be specific (e.g., “only four amendments were passed in the nineteenth century” rather than “few amendments were passed in the nineteenth century”).

Sample Question

Individual Contributions to Hillary Clinton
by Tier of Contribution, 2016 Presidential Election



Individual Contributions to Donald Trump
by Tier of Contribution, 2016 Presidential Election



Source: www.fec.gov

Use the information graphic to respond to Parts A, B, and C.

- (A) Identify the tier of individual contributions to Hillary Clinton's campaign that accounts for the third largest proportion of her total.
- (B) Describe a similarity or difference between the data for individual contributions for each candidate and draw a possible conclusion based on this similarity or difference.
- (C) Explain a reason that individual contributions are capped at \$2,700, and explain a possible impact of this cap on elections.

Step 1: Analyze the Prompt

Carefully analyze the components of the information graphic: titles, labels, and general trends. Notice that the information graphic contains two pie charts. Both depict individual contributions at different tiers to presidential candidates in 2016; one shows contributions for Clinton, one for Trump. The contribution tiers are the same for both candidates. Contributions of \$200 and less represent the lowest tier; this tier makes up the biggest proportion of both candidates' contributions from individuals. Note that there must be a limit at \$2,700 since the tiers don't go any higher. Clinton also had a large proportion of contributions at the highest tier, while Trump's were a bit more evenly distributed among the middle-high tiers. The dollar totals show that Clinton had a much higher total amount of contributions.

Next, carefully read and mark the important parts of each question, paying special attention to questions that ask for multiple things; note that Part B asks you to both *describe* and *draw a conclusion* and Part C includes two things you must *explain*. Keep in mind that Quantitative Analysis questions generally ask you to first read data from the information graphic, then make some analysis of the data, and finally apply the data to a course concept.

Step 2: Plan Your Response

Brainstorm how you will address each response part based on your analysis in Step 1. See the following thoughts and notes that a high-scoring writer might make.

Part A: Need to find the 3rd largest tier on Clinton's pie chart.

- \$1,000–\$1,999

Part B: Need one similarity or difference, and a conclusion based on this info.

- similarity: <\$200 largest proportion
concl.: many want to support candidates; even small contributions add up

Part C: Need to fully explain two things.

- caps on ind. contribs b/c concerns about buying elections, campaign finance laws
- cap probably helps limit the total amount at the highest tier; caps help equalize contribs among candidates & limit scope of campaigning (ex. of candidate highly supported by wealthy)

Step 3: Action! Write Your Response & Step 4: Proofread

Then, use your plan to write out your response, leaving a minute at the end to complete a brisk proofread. Remember that it is suggested you spend about 20 minutes each on Questions 1, 2, and 3. See the following for a sample high-scoring response and an explanation of its high-scoring features.

Part 3 Comprehensive Review

Sample High-Scoring Response

The third largest proportion of Clinton's individual contributions total was the tier of \$1,000–\$1,999.

A similarity in the data about individual contributions is that both candidates' most common donation is the lowest-tier amount, \$200 or less. This suggests that both candidates have widespread support among less-wealthy voters. To constitute such a high percentage of the total contributions even though it is the lowest tier, this indicates that many individuals must have contributed to the campaigns.

Individual contributions to candidates were capped due to concerns about money having too large of an influence on elections, threatening what is supposed to be a democratic process in which every voter has an equal voice. In an unregulated system, a wealthier candidate with wealthier supporters could overrun the media with political messages, perhaps having such an overwhelming impact on public opinion that the election was essentially purchased by the side with more money at its disposal. To prevent this, Congress passed campaign finance laws; limiting individual contributions perhaps prevents a disproportionate influence by wealthy supporters. These laws thus help equalize contributions among candidates, making elections more fair. Limits help minimize the potential for out-of-control campaigning with essentially limitless money for candidates to spend.

Explanation of Sample Response

Note the following successful elements of this high-scoring response:

- **Organization:** The writer uses one paragraph for each part of the response and follows the plan from Step 2, helping to ensure that the response addresses every required task.
- **Complete sentences:** The writer uses full sentences for every part of the response—even the brief identification task in Part A.
- **Specific data from the information graphic:** The writer uses specific data for the response to Part B.
- **Addressing each action word:** The writer addresses each action word appropriately. For instance, in Part A, the writer uses a brief sentence to address the requirement of *identification*. In contrast, Part C requires two *explanations*, so the writer fully explains both a reason for and an impact of contribution caps, effectively incorporating an example of a candidate with many wealthy supporters to help support the explanations.

Scoring for Question 2: 5 points (1 + 2 + 2)

Part A (1 point)

One point for identifying \$1,000–\$1,999 as the third largest proportion for Clinton's campaign.

Part B (2 points)

One point for describing a similarity or difference.

- Example similarities: both candidates had lowest tier (<\$200) make up the largest percentage of contributions; middle tiers were similar for both candidates
- Example differences: Clinton's second-highest percentage tier was the highest contribution level (\$2,000+) and made up about a third of her total contribution amounts, while Trump had a near-tie for the second-highest percentage tier (\$200-\$500 and \$2,000+); Clinton had much higher total contribution dollars than Trump both at each tier and overall

One point for drawing a logical possible conclusion based on the similarity or difference.

- Example conclusions: based on high percentage of lowest-tier contributions, both candidates may have had large numbers of supporters who could not afford contributions at higher tiers; based on Clinton's larger percentage of highest-tier contributions, she may have had a greater number of wealthy supporters than Trump; Clinton lost the election although she had more individual contribution dollars than Trump, suggesting that the candidate with the highest contributions from individuals does not necessarily win the election

Part C (2 points)

One point for explaining a reason for the cap on individual contributions.

- Example reasons for the cap: concerns about wealthy individuals and corporations "buying" elections have led to campaign finance laws and contribution caps; cap reflects attempts to limit spending on pervasive advertising, especially "attack ads"; cap reflects restrictions such as Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002's regulations on "soft money" contributions by individuals

One point for explaining a possible impact of the cap on elections.

- Example impacts on elections: limits potential for elections to be dominated by wealthy contributors; potentially limits unfair advantage of candidates who have more wealthy supporters; forces individuals who wish to contribute more than the cap to use other avenues of financial support, such as political party committees and PACs, which increases such institutions' influence on elections

SCOTUS COMPARISON

Overview

Question 3 is the SCOTUS Comparison FRQ. It begins with a two-paragraph stimulus that describes the background and holding for a non-required Supreme Court case. Don't worry: you are not expected to have any outside knowledge of the non-required case. All the information about the

Part 3 Comprehensive Review

case needed to answer the question will be provided. (Note: Lists of College Board's 9 foundational documents and 15 required SCOTUS cases, and some key information about each, are available in the back of this book.)

The prompts that follow the stimulus will ask you to relate the non-required case to one of the required SCOTUS cases. Specifically:

- Part A will often ask you to *identify* a constitutional clause or principle that is relevant to both cases.
- Part B will often require you to compare or contrast the two cases, perhaps asking you to *explain* why the facts of the cases resulted in different holdings.
- Part C will likely require you to *apply* the case's ruling to a political action or principle. For instance, you could be asked how citizens could react to a ruling with which they disagree.

Strategy

Because it compares the reasoning of two court cases, the SCOTUS Comparison question may be the most abstract and complex prompt you encounter on the free-response section. It is therefore extra important to use the Kaplan Method in order to organize your ideas and logically think through your response. Also, consider these factors that are specific to the SCOTUS Comparison FRQ:

- The stimulus will explain a new case to you. (Remember, you are not expected to have any outside knowledge of the new case.) Since court case backgrounds and holdings are nuanced, pay very close attention to the details and reasoning of the new case. Consider writing a brief paraphrase of the case holding in your own words.
- The questions will always refer to one of the required SCOTUS cases. It may be helpful to spend a few moments reviewing what you know about the required case; jot down the main idea of the required case's holding before getting too far into the questions.
 - If asked why the cases resulted in similar or different holdings, carefully consider the background of both cases: what essential difference or similarity between the two led the Court to the individual holdings?

Sample Question

In Utah in 1874, George Reynolds was indicted by a grand jury and later found guilty of bigamy (marriage to more than one person) under the federal Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act, passed by Congress in 1862, which prohibited residents of territories to marry someone while still married to someone else. Reynolds, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS Church), presented himself as a test case to challenge the Morrill Act, arguing that the law violated LDS Church members' First Amendment freedom of religion rights. Reynolds argued that it was his religious duty to marry multiple wives, and thus the practice should be protected under the First Amendment.

The case was appealed to the Supreme Court, and in *Reynolds v. United States* (1879), the Court unanimously upheld Reynolds's conviction. In its holding that the Morrill Act did not violate the First Amendment's protections of religious freedom, the court distinguished between religious belief and religious action. While Congress cannot legislate against the former, it can regulate religious action; in this case, the holding justified the prohibition of the action of bigamy based on the tradition of English law. In addition, the Court concluded that "to permit this would be to make the professed doctrines of religious belief superior to the law of the land, and in effect to permit every citizen to become a law unto himself," perhaps leading to claiming practices like human sacrifice as protected religious actions.

Based on the information given, respond to Parts A, B, and C.

- (A) Identify the constitutional clause that is common to both *Reynolds v. United States* (1879) and *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972).
- (B) Based on the constitutional clause identified in Part A, explain why the facts of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* led to a different holding than the holding in *Reynolds v. United States*.
- (C) Describe a political action that members of the public who disagree with the holding in *Reynolds v. United States* could take to attempt to impact the legality of bigamy.

Step 1: Analyze the Prompt

Since court cases involve abstract reasoning and many details, learning about new cases is a complex task. To help keep the information from the stimulus straight, underline or jot down the key facts and write a paraphrase of the ruling. The following is an example of brief notes a high-scoring writer might make.

Key details:

- R found guilty of violating federal law against bigamy
- R claimed law violated 1st Am. right, since bigamy part of LDS Church belief

Holding:

- conviction upheld, law did not violate 1st Am., religious beliefs v. actions, actions may be limited or otherwise anything could be claimed to be a justified religious action

After analyzing the questions for the content and action words (in this case, *identify*, *explain*, *describe*), review the required SCOTUS case (introduced in the question stem). Consider writing a few quick notes to refresh your memory about the required case so that you can keep the cases straight and make a solid plan for answering the various parts of the prompt.

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Wisconsin v. Yoder:

- Amish children stopped attending school after 8th grade, breaking WI law
- Amish believed more edu. bad
- Court ruled with Amish parents: requiring more edu. violated free exercise clause (by 14th Am.) b/c action based on sincere belief and not harmful to students/society

Step 2: Plan Your Response

The following is an example of how a high-scoring writer might plan an answer to this question, including the writer's thought process and notes.

Part A: Free exercise clause.

Part B: Need to note the difference in the reasoning of the rulings, and what led to different holdings.

- R v. US: law against bigamy const. b/c not all religious actions are protected by free ex. clause, only beliefs; bigamy can be prohibited based on tradition - action not protected
- Y v. WI: law requiring more edu. unconst. b/c stopping edu. based on sincere belief & not harmful - action protected

Part C: Need to write about what action someone can take if they disagree with a federal law.

- petition Congress members to change law
- elect new reps. who will change law

Part 3: Action! Write Your Response & Step 4: Proofread

Use your plan to write each part of the response, and briskly skim for errors when finished.

See the following high-scoring response, and be sure to read the points in the explanation about what makes this response effective. Think about what features you can incorporate into your own free-response answers.

Sample High-Scoring Response

Both cases concern the free exercise clause of the 1st Amendment, since both have to do with laws that prohibit acting in accordance with religious beliefs. However, the rulings in the cases differed due to the Court's interpretation of the religious actions involved. In general, the government cannot pass a law that prohibits someone from exercising their religion. In *Reynolds v. US*, Reynolds argued that the federal law against bigamy violated his right to practice his religion, believing the practice to be a duty as a member of the LDS

Church. In *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, some Amish parents had stopped sending their children to public school after 8th grade, believing that further education was unnecessary and even harmful to their faith. The Court sided against Reynolds, but with the Amish parents. In *Reynolds*, the Court determined that not all religious actions are protected by the 1st Amendment; otherwise, people could claim that any action, no matter how controversial, was necessary for practicing their religion. Although the government cannot legislate against belief, it could, in this case based on tradition, legislate against the action of bigamy. However, in *Wisconsin*, the Court held that the state could not force the students to continue in public education because the action was based on a sincere, non-harmful, religious belief. Thus, the Amish action, unlike bigamy, was a protected religious action under the 1st Amendment.

As with any Court ruling about a federal law, citizens can take political action to protest it, such as trying to influence Congress. Citizens could attempt to get Congress to change the law by writing and trying to persuade their representatives. Also, citizens could draw attention to the issue during future elections and attempt to elect candidates who would support changing the law prohibiting bigamy.

Sample Response Explanation

Note a couple of the successful features of the high-scoring sample response:

- **Organization:** The writer combines the responses for Parts A and B into the same paragraph, which is effective since the response for Part A is very brief. Although the first paragraph of the response is lengthy, it reflects the complexity of the explanation required for Part B.
- **Addressing each action word:** Part B's *explanation* requires both a summary of the required case, *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, and a comparison explaining the difference between the two cases. When you see the action words like *describe* or *explain*, be sure to include a full, detailed discussion that covers all relevant points/sides. Although the question may seem to be asking for only one item, the rubric may score the question out of two points due to its complexity.

Scoring for Question 3: 4 points (1 + 2 + 1)

Part A (1 point)

One point for identifying the free exercise clause (of the First Amendment) as relevant in both cases.

Part B (2 points)

One point for identifying relevant facts about *Wisconsin v. Yoder*.

- Example facts: ruling held that requiring students to attend public school past 8th grade violated Amish parents' right to free exercise of their religion

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One point for explaining why the facts in both cases led to different holdings.

- Example explanations: both cases concern free exercise of religious actions based on beliefs; in *Reynolds*, the Court determined that not every action that is claimed to be religious is protected; in *Reynolds*, the action was determined to violate traditional law, while in *Wisconsin*, the Court found no justification to prohibit the action, which they deemed was based on legitimate religious beliefs and did not result in the students burdening society; the scenario in *Wisconsin* did not fit the extreme examples of constitutionally limited religious actions as outlined in *Reynolds*

Part C (1 point)

One point for describing a valid political action of dissenters.

- Example actions: petitioning their representatives to change the law prohibiting bigamy, campaigning for/voting for candidates to Congress who would support legislation to permit bigamy, forming an interest group focused on the issue, organizing protests to draw attention to the Supreme Court ruling

ARGUMENT ESSAY

Overview

Question 4 will always be the Argument Essay. These questions begin with a brief paragraph about a given topic, such as the balance between federal and state powers. The prompt will then give specific instructions about how you must format your essay, including a list of several required **foundational** documents that are relevant to the topic at hand. You will need to discuss one of the listed documents as well as another piece of specific evidence from your own knowledge. (Note: A full list of College Board's 9 foundational docs and 15 required SCOTUS cases is in the Resources section at the back of this book.)

Strategy

The Argument Essay differs substantially from the other free-response questions on the AP U.S. Government and Politics exam, but you can and should still follow the Kaplan Method (AP-AP). It is recommended that you take 40 minutes to plan and write your Argument Essay (as opposed to 20 minutes each for the other free-response questions), so just double the time it typically takes you to complete each step of the Method.

While the scoring for the first three free-response questions is more straightforward—you earn points (or not) based on fully addressing each part of the prompt—the scoring for the Argument Essay is a little more complex. The following rubric outlines what the AP readers are generally looking for when they grade your Argument Essay; note the various categories and the ways you can earn points. (You will also see a prompt-specific sample rubric later in this section.)

General Rubric (6 points)

Category	Scoring Criteria	Notes
Thesis	1 pt for stating a claim that can be defended, is responsive to the issue posed, and sets up a line of reasoning.	The idea of “because” or “why” should be clear. You cannot earn a point if all you do is state the topic or prompt in different words.
Support	1 pt for presenting a piece of evidence relevant to the topic. OR 2 pts for using a single piece of evidence appropriately supporting your thesis. OR 3 pts for using two pieces of evidence appropriately supporting your thesis.	Your evidence should directly relate to the claim(s) made by your thesis. You cannot earn more than 1 point if you haven’t stated a thesis.
Reasoning	1 pt for explaining why or how the evidence you are presenting supports your thesis.	Again, a thesis must have been stated. Also, be sure to specifically address at least one piece of evidence here.
Reply to Alternative Viewpoint	1 pt for offering a point of view different from or opposing yours, and going on to rebut it, refute it, or concede it.	You need to explicitly state an alternative viewpoint, and either argue against it (rebut), attempt to prove it false (refute), or grant that it has some validity (concede).

Sample Question

Construct an argument that explains which of the three models of representation—trustee, delegate, or politico—best reflects the founders’ intentions with regard to the relationship between legislators and their constituents.

In your essay, you must:

- Formulate a defensible thesis that establishes a chain of reasoning.
- Provide evidence for your thesis with at least two pieces of relevant, accurate information.
 - Take at least ONE of your pieces of evidence from the following list of foundational documents.
 - *Federalist 10*
 - *Brutus 1*
 - U.S. Constitution
 - Take your other piece of evidence from a different foundational document from the list above OR from your own study.
- Logically explain why your evidence supports your thesis.
- Present and reply to an alternative viewpoint using refutation, concession, or rebuttal.

Step 1: Analyze the Prompt

The Argument Essay question format is relatively straightforward, and the language will largely be the same for all Argument Essay prompts except for two parts: the topic and the short list of relevant foundational documents. With this in mind, analyzing the prompt for this question type is easy! Just make sure you have a solid grasp of the topic, and then continue to the planning stage.

Step 2: Plan Your Response

You'll want to create a brief outline before you start writing, just like you would for any other full-length essay. As you saw from the rubric, AP readers are interested in your thesis development, your use of evidence, and your treatment of an alternative view. Everything you write should be toward one or more of those ends.

You will need to state a thesis that specifically addresses the prompt and makes a claim. Avoid rewording the prompt or being too general. A good question to ask yourself is, "Am I actually taking a position on this issue that someone else might argue against?" Also, while the Argument Essay necessitates a longer, more detailed response than the other free-response question types, it does not require a formal introduction; in fact, writing a lengthy introduction can take up valuable time and frustrate the AP reader who is scoring your essay. Assert your thesis as soon as possible, and then move into the rest of your response.

It is important to note that the Argument Essay's topic and prompt wording will always intentionally allow for multiple positions. Therefore, you should be strategic and choose the position that you can best back up with evidence. You may even advocate for a different position than the one you personally agree with! To that end, no matter how strongly you feel about a topic, always present your evidence and claims in a balanced manner. Throughout your essay, even and especially when responding to an alternative viewpoint, avoid wording that makes it seem like your argument is simply your personal opinion (e.g., "I think" or "I believe," or any language that is overly emotional). With all of this in mind, a high-scoring writer might write the following outline:

Thesis: *Trustee is the best model (ideals of Constitution)*

Evidence:

- From list: *Federalist 10*
 - *Madison's fear: large country + big gov't = factions (many groups disagree)*
 - *Trustee can mediate, come to concl, act in best interests*
- From my own study: *social mov'ts*
 - *Needed trustee model to make change*
 - *Civil rights and women's rights movements*
 - *The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965*

Response to alternative view: *Anti-Feds would fear large repub (Brutus), but pol system in place would keep trustee honest*

Part 3: Action! Write Response & Step 4: Proofread

Use your plan to write each part of the response, and briskly skim for errors when finished. See the following high-scoring response, and pay extra attention to the rubric and scoring notes so you see how to apply this model to your own writing.

Sample High-Scoring Response

The trustee model of legislative representation is the best reflection of the founders' intentions in setting up American democracy because it offers the best hope for what the Preamble to the Constitution calls "a more perfect union," one that will bring together warring factions and increase harmony.

As James Madison pointed out in Federalist 10, it is inevitable that a republic will contain many groups which vehemently disagree. The bigger a country grows, the more frequent and violent factional clashes are likely to become. Madison was looking ahead to a U.S. that would burst the bounds of the original colonies and create more factionalism. This vision of an expanding, clashing nation makes the trustee model very appealing. A trustee Congressperson is one who will listen to all sides, make an independent judgment, but then go on to explain it so that opponents may be persuaded to change their minds, thus bringing resolution to conflicts.

A trustee is a representative willing to do the principled thing even if the public thinks otherwise. Many issues in our history have seemed so polarized that they were beyond resolution and could not wait for popular consensus. This was the case with civil rights issues and legislation in the 1960s. Technically, African Americans had the right to vote since the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. However, this right was violently suppressed through intimidation tactics and a variety of restrictive measures such as poll taxes and literacy tests. It was not until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that substantial voting protections were extended to all black people. The Voting Rights Act outlawed literacy tests and other tactics; under this act, federal officials were sent to the South to ensure that African Americans were allowed to vote free from fear and intimidation, and the election practices of local governments were held under greater scrutiny. Civil rights movement leaders had challenged discriminatory practices for decades, but due to intense polarization in society, there was not public consensus on how to address racism in voting practices, or even agreement as to whether to address it at all. Legislators had to go against the opinions of the majority in order to act in a way that advanced American ideals for all citizens, and the public eventually caught up.

Similarly, legislators pushed through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which was supported by people within social movements but not by the general populace. Additionally, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 touched on the goals of not just the civil rights movement but also the women's rights movement; for example, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibited sex discrimination in public accommodations. Members of these movements had been working for years to get society at large to expand rights and protections to all people. However, if legislators had

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Comprehensive Review

waited to act until a majority of their constituency approved of these civil rights bills, the bills may never have passed. In this way, the trustee model can be used to uphold the rights of the minority despite majority resistance.

The trustee idea would have been opposed by Brutus and other Anti-Federalists. Brutus 1 warns that a large republic would necessarily be disconnected from its people. Following this logic, a concern with the trustee model would be that the representative would deviate too far from the will of the people and become despotic. But it is important to note that the people have the ultimate voice if they disagree with the trustee's judgments: the power of the ballot. The legislator's desire to stay in power is a strong check on him or her, acting as an incentive to listen to constituents.

All in all, the trustee is in the best position to reduce the intense factionalism Madison feared. Even before the advance of mass media, the trustee had many means to learn of the people's different views and to explain why the legislator was voting a certain way, or advancing this or that philosophy. This give and take of ideas surely helped to get the republic through its rocky early decades, and also helped the country to recover from the volatile growing pains and changes in the mid-twentieth century by finding ways to bring people together and advance equal rights for all.

Sample Response Explanation and Scoring

Note the following successful features of the high-scoring sample response:

- **Thesis (0–1 pt):** The writer sets up a clear *X because Y* sentence to introduce the thesis, which could be paraphrased as, *The trustee model brings about harmony*. Everything that follows is connected to the founders' ideal of harmony. The writer would therefore earn 1 point for Thesis.
- **Support (0–3 pts):** There is more than enough evidence to gain the full 3 points for Support, as the writer explains Madison's argument in *Federalist 10* and elaborates upon relevant historical examples of disharmony that those acting as trustees helped to fix through assertive actions. In addition, the references to the Constitution and *Brutus 1* (while unnecessary for earning full credit in Support) show a strong command of course material.
- **Reasoning (0–1 pt):** The writer earns the 1 point for Reasoning by clearly explaining how a trustee offers the best hope for Madison's vision. Specifically, the writer asserts in paragraphs 3 and 4 how trustees could not wait for public opinion in order to act.
- **Reply to Alternative Viewpoint (0–1 pt):** There is a whole paragraph at the end dedicated to rebutting the Anti-Federalists' objections. In this way, the writer makes it clear that this requirement has been met and earns the final 1 point.

Question-Specific Rubric: 6 points (1 + 3 + 1 + 1)

Category	Types of Appropriate Responses	Notes
A: Thesis (1 pt for stating a claim that can be defended, is responsive to the issue posed, and sets up a line of reasoning)	"The trustee/delegate/politico model of representation most closely reflects the founders' intent in that _____."	You cannot earn a point if all you do is list the three models and echo the idea that all deal with the legislator/constituent relationship. The blank indicates that you should provide an answer to the question, "Why?" Why is this model the closest reflector?
B: Support (1 pt for presenting a piece of evidence relevant to the topic)	A correct statement about, or definition of, one of the three models, including relating it to the given context.	The response must define one of the three models and discuss the founders' original intent.
OR B: Support (2 pts for using a single piece of evidence appropriately supporting your thesis)	<i>Federalist 10</i> —The dangers inherent in factions, and government's ability to control factions' effects. U.S. Constitution—Passage of the Seventeenth Amendment, providing for direct election of senators. <i>Brutus 1</i> —Warning that a large republic must create a disconnect between representatives and the people.	Including a relevant reference from one of the listed founding documents is important.
OR B: Support (3 pts for using two pieces of evidence appropriately supporting your thesis)	"The Internet makes it easy for voters to let their representatives know what's on their minds." "Mass media, unimagined in the founders' day, offers unprecedented access for elected officials to both present their views and hear those of their constituents." "The U.S. population is almost 11,000 percent larger than when the Constitution was drafted, which means a diversity of viewpoints virtually impossible for any sitting Congressperson to reconcile."	Your second piece of evidence can come from your reading or general knowledge. Be sure it is relevant to the matter at hand.

(Continued)

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(Continued)

Category	Types of Appropriate Responses	Notes
C: Reasoning (1 pt for explaining why or how your evidence supports your thesis)	<p>"The inevitability of quarreling factors, correctly identified in <i>Federalist</i> 10, means that any position a representative takes is sure to alienate some large group of constituents. So he or she might as well opt for the wise position rather than the popular one, and then try to persuade the electors of that wisdom."</p> <p>"The speedy passage of the Seventeenth Amendment, which allows for the direct election of senators, indicates that the founders who argued for the delegate model anticipated the view that the representative is the people's servant, not their tutor."</p> <p>"<i>Brutus</i> 1 indicated that the larger the republic, the more disconnected the government would become from its citizens. However, the delegate model combats that disconnection because it hitches legislators' votes to the majority opinion."</p>	Note that each example falls into the broad form of "[Evidence], and thus [Conclusion]." Don't just assume that readers will know how your evidence supports your thesis. Tell them how it does.
D: Reply to Alternative Viewpoint (1 pt for offering a point of view different from yours and going on to rebut, refute, or concede it)	Present a weakness of the model you've chosen as the best reflection of founders' views, or present a defense of one of the other two models as a better reflection. Then reply to this alternative with a rebuttal, refutation, or concession.	You can't just bring up the alternative perspective and expect to get the point. You need to reply to it in some way, either by arguing against it or granting that it has some truth.

In this chapter, you've learned about the structure of the FRQ section and the steps to crafting successful responses. To maximize your scoring potential, however, you'll need to apply what you learned. Practice by responding to the free-response questions from the practice exams. You can do this as part of taking a full-length exam, or you can take the FRQ section on its own. You can even practice answering one FRQ at a time. Whatever your approach, be sure to write under timed conditions. (As a reminder, you will have 100 minutes total on the official exam; the recommended timing breakdown is 20 minutes for each of the first 3 FRQs, and 40 minutes for the final FRQ, the Argument Essay.)

Make sure to compare your answers against the samples and scoring information provided and to carefully consider whether you met each requirement. If possible, ask someone else to help you fairly assess your responses. Then, reflect on which successful qualities you displayed in your responses, as well as which qualities you should try to adopt on your next practice set. Remember, the free-response section makes up half of your total exam score, so it's worth it to prepare thoroughly!