

AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
2005 SCORING COMMENTARY (Form B)

Question 2

Sample: 2A

Score: 9

This well-written, persuasive essay stresses from the start that the predominant tone of the passage is one of pity, made evident through “the juxtaposition of his [McTeague’s] strength and his stupidity.” The student demonstrates how diction builds up, then undercuts McTeague in paragraph one. The essay thoroughly chronicles how details demonstrate the sources of the narrator’s pity. McTeague’s failures—“his clients are limited to ‘butcher boys, shop girls, drug clerks, and car conductors’—none of which are professions that would allow great amounts of spending on dental work,” his office a “corner room . . . far removed and remote,” exhaling “‘a mingled odor of bedding, creosote, and ether’”—are all richly detailed. This is followed by an exceptional paragraph on syntax that brings in fuller dimensions of tone—“irony,” “sympathy,” “reverses,” “balance sheet,” “stupid contentment”—all arising from shrewd insights about how the syntax works. The student clearly understands that the dentist’s “endless balance sheet of unfavorable items” outweighs “what potential may exist.” The conclusion shows again a perfect control of argument: “diction and details create a tone that adds credibility to the narrator’s attitude, leaving the reader with no choice but to agree with him.” The only limitation in this sophisticated analysis is the fact that the student does not see the humor of the passage, and what irony is recognized is only briefly discussed.

Sample: 2B

Score: 7

Two excellent sentences begin this essay. The writer addresses both tone and technique in the brief introduction: “With an almost cruelly indifferent tone, the author uses structure, setting, and metaphor to describe McTeague as a simple man of simple background with simple ambitions. By refusing to deliver an outright opinion of McTeague the author does not speak ill of him but by not praising him for his honest intentions and good work, he defines McTeague as unsatisfactory.” The rest of the essay is good, but it does not go into sufficient detail to develop the claims that are asserted as convincingly as essays that earned an 8 or 9. The student recognizes the author’s pity for McTeague but doesn’t develop this idea. Some excellent diction (“This barb,” “stupid oaf,” “previous jabs”) and vigorous writing (“the author clearly illustrates his disdain for this simple man and his simple dreams”) cannot fully compensate for this student’s sketchy analysis.

Sample: 2C

Score: 5

While this student understands that the “entire tone . . . is mocking,” with “unflattering” descriptions of McTeague, the essay relies too heavily on simple summary. This student does not analyze how the details show the narrator’s “dislike” and “superiority.” Repetition of sentence openers (“The first,” “The first,” “Next,” “The author then,” “Then the author,” “Next”) does not suggest much attentiveness to style. Overall, this is a one-dimensional discussion. The final body paragraph, on syntax, is weak, claiming—incorrectly—that the sentences describing McTeague’s dwelling are ‘short and worded simply,’ when some are actually quite long and detailed. A very brief conclusion relies on merely a single sentence to summarize the points the essay has already covered. Thus, the essay’s treatment of the passage is superficial and pedestrian.