

Scoring Rubric for Free Response Question Two: From Oliver Goldsmith’s “A Little Great Man”

- 9 Essays earning a score of 9 meet all the criteria for 8 papers and in addition are especially thorough in their analysis or demonstrate a particularly impressive control of style.
- 8 Essays earning a score of 8 effectively assess how the author uses rhetorical techniques to convey his attitude towards great men. They present a carefully reasoned argument in support of their position and enlist appropriate evidence from the text that supports it. Their prose demonstrates an impressive control of the elements of effective writing, though it is not flawless.
- 7 Essays earning a score of 7 fit the description of 6 essays but feature either more purposeful arguments or a greater command of prose style.
- 6 Essays scoring 6 accurately assess how the author uses rhetorical techniques to convey his attitude towards great men. Their arguments, while generally sound in nature and adequately supported, are nevertheless not as persuasive as papers earning scores of 7 or better due to their being less developed or less cogent. Though these papers may feature lapses in diction or syntax, they are generally clear and effective.
- 5 Essays scoring 5 generally understand the task but are either limited in scope or insufficiently developed. Though they may be marked by errors in syntax or diction, they nevertheless reflect a certain level of competence.
- 4 Essays scoring 4 respond inadequately to the question’s task, often misunderstanding, misrepresenting, or oversimplifying the author’s attitude towards great men, or providing insufficient evidence as to the rhetorical techniques he uses to convey it. Though the prose is often adequate enough to convey the writers’ claims, it generally suggests a limited control over organization, diction, or syntax.
- 3 Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for a score of 4, but are either less persuasive in illustrating how the author uses rhetorical techniques to convey his attitude towards great men, or display a more limited control over the elements of effective composition.
- 2 Essays scoring 2 achieve little success in illustrating how the author uses rhetorical techniques to convey his attitude towards great men. They may on occasion misread the passage, fail to develop their argument to any substantive level, summarize rather than analyze the passage, or display significant weaknesses in organization, clarity, fluency, or mechanics.
- 1 Essays earning a score of 1 meet the criteria for a score of 2 but are either overly simplistic or marred by severe deficiencies in the elements of composition.
- 0 Essays scoring 0 offer an off-topic response that receives no credit or a mere repetition of the prompt.
- Indicates a blank or completely off-topic response.

Student Response 1

The author of this passage chooses to write his view of a great man. In half a year, he claims to have known of 25 great men. He feels though that society has changed the very idea of what a great man should be. He speaks of a man he had met and decided that a great man is not really what he will like to support. He feels he cannot gaze at the man in admiration.

The author was invited by a gentleman to witness a “great man.” He found the man to be “insupportable.” When he tried to speak to him, the man “contradicted with a snap.” The author tried again several times to gain back his reputation. But he was “beaten back by confusion.” It seemed that the man had tried to be of greater knowledge than the author. To be described as one to fight back with confusion would suggest that the man did not know what he was talking about and had therefore tried to speak on his account in circles to confuse the person from ever trying to speak up again.

The author believes that after witnessing the “great man” secure admirers, he may act in any way and his disciples would believe he was a proper man. The man would try to impress people of little knowledge he had on a subject. If anyone had tried to fight back, his immediate response is a confused circle. The gazettes say that the men are posterity to gaze at with admiration. In the author’s case if you were unknowledgeable of the subjects the “great man” would speak about, you can easily be taken into believing any lie he wishes to spread.

The author believes that there is something odd in the idea of greatness because we are “seldom astonished by a thing very much resembling ourselves.” The man he met was the same as the average person. He wished to be admired by the things he has. In one paragraph, the author asks questions as to what makes this great man. “Does the mayor of a corporation make a speech? He is instantly set down for a great man?” He claims that “How diminutive soever the object of admiration, each is followed by a crowd of still more diminutive admirers.” The little bits of paradoxes or simple contradicting ideas are worth greatly to a man in progress. It is his way of gaining the small man.

The author concludes his speech with the acts of the great men. He feels they “all fancying themselves known to the rest of the world...”. No matter what country he can visit, there will always be a crowd of ten or twelve of these “little great men.” The author truly does not feel they are worthy of admiration. They are (to him): insupportable, assertive, and have their minds fixed on things then [sic] true matters. He sees all the ridiculous attitudes of the people who gain admiration. He describes these men as the start of a train. Behind him, he looks back in satisfaction at his admirers. He uses transgressional terms to supercede his knowledge. In total, the great man is a true trickster of words. One who can be admired only by his wit.

Student Free-Response Assessment Sheet

1. Restate the essential parts of the free-response question. What is it that the question asks the student to do?

2. Identify what this student did well. In what ways did this response answer the question? What details and/or arguments did you find most convincing?

3. Was there anything about this student's essay which did NOT answer the question? Any part of this student's argument which you did not find convincing? How fluently and clearly did you think this paper was written?

4. On a 0-9 scale, what do you think this paper might receive?

Student Response 2

The question that comes to mind within the first few sentences of this essay is: what constitutes a great man? After a complete reading it becomes clear that, in the mind of the author, whatever the standard is, it needs to be raised because there are too many supposedly great men who are in reality incompetent fools. The reader comes to believe that his attitude toward great men is mixed because he is unsure whether to believe “great” when he hears it.

He introduces the topic with numbers, specifically “twenty-five great men, seventeen very great men, and nine very extraordinary men.” Later in the paragraph he casts doubt on their being labeled great when he says, “I wonder...whether the people, in future times, will have any other business to mind.” In this statement he deals with the idea of duty and responsibility in great men, and sarcastically asks if all the “great men” he had read about have anything else to do besides be acknowledged and lauded by the general public surrounding them. This sardonic tone is a red light to the reader that he does endorse these great men, and that idea is residual in the reader’s mind throughout the rest of the selection.

He also casts doubt on their greatness when he subtly maligns those who deem them great, namely the masses of less-great people. “Each is followed by a crowd of still more diminutive admirers,” he says, thus implying that many of these diminutive admirers are so blinded by the supposed greatness of their idols that they fail to stop and think whether or not their adulation is justified. Also, in the first sentences he cites specific examples as to the case of being christened great, implicitly saying that the title is handed out too easily.

The third paragraph is one extended anecdote through which he proves his point quite clearly: that those that people say are great are not always great. “This man pretends to know China even better than myself!” he says incredulously. This mild shock at the man’s cheek is an effective reflection of his own amazement at society’s pedestals for great men. He continues this a few sentences later with a logical progression of thought (man does great deed, man is lauded as great, man finds circle of admirers) that results in greatness being used as an excuse to cover up stupid everyday errors as “elevation of sentiment.”

The author may not employ alliteration or metaphor to make his ideas clear, but his great variety of examples, sarcastic and disbelieving tone, and many different aspects of his claim produce a wholly convincing argument.

Student Free-Response Assessment Sheet

1. Restate the essential parts of the free-response question. What is it that the question asks the student to do?

2. Identify what this student did well. In what ways did this response answer the question? What details and/or arguments did you find most convincing?

3. Was there anything about this student's essay which did NOT answer the question? Any part of this student's argument which you did not find convincing? How fluently and clearly did you think this paper was written?

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Student Response 3

The author of the passage appears to believe that most great men are not as great as they, or others, would believe, and that that they remain “great” because the common man cannot recognize their faults. He supports these assertions through the use of a subtly sarcastic tone and complicated syntax.

Sarcasm runs throughout the passage, and colors everything the author writes. This sarcasm serves to highlight how foolish he believes the “great” people to be. In the first paragraph, the author writes “I wonder how posterity will be able to remember them all, or whether the people, in future times, will have any other business to mind, but that of getting the catalogue by heart.” The author knows that people have (or at least, should have) better things to do than occupy themselves with thoughts of the false great people. But the common man does not realize that many of the people he admires, do not deserve their place on the pedestal. The author believes that these “great” men are admired, in part, because the common man is even less noteworthy. He writes “How diminutive soever the object of admiration, each is followed by a crowd of still more diminutive admirers.” His sarcasm puts down the common man as well, but is focused on the illusion of greatness that has been created because these average men have never encountered true greatness. To emphasize how the false greatness of these men is overlooked, near the end of the passage, the author writes, “If he transgresses the common forms of breeding, mistakes even a teapot for a tobacco box, it is said, that his thoughts are fixed on more important objects.” The people are so convinced that the man is great, they will overlook even the most plain evidence that he is not.

Though sentence structure has a lesser role in conveying the author’s message, its presence should be noted. The first paragraph of the piece contains a number of long sentences connected together with commas and semi-colons. This paragraph holds the writer’s thesis and, as such, is his most important. He also changes the order of certain sentences. The author writes, “These, say the gazettes, are the men that posterity are to gaze at with admiration.” A more conventional wording would say, “According to the gazettes, posterity will gaze on these men with admiration.” The second paragraph contains sentences that ask questions and provide the answer. The author writes, “Does the mayor of a corporation make a speech? He is instantly set down for a great man.” This highlights the author’s assertion that seemingly trivial actions can have a person labeled as extraordinary. One interesting note can be found later in the passage when the author combines the somewhat complicated syntax and his sardonic tone, to poke fun at himself. “Heavens, thought I, this man pretends to know China even better than myself!” Apparently the author also thinks of himself as an important man.

The author of this passage also utilizes diction (in the form of higher order terms) and choice of detail (such as in the dinner conversation) to support his claim. Syntax and tone are simply perhaps more noticeable.

Student Free-Response Assessment Sheet

1. Restate the essential parts of the free-response question. What is it that the question asks the student to do?

2. Identify what this student did well. In what ways did this response answer the question? What details and/or arguments did you find most convincing?

3. Was there anything about this student's essay which did NOT answer the question? Any part of this student's argument which you did not find convincing? How fluently and clearly did you think this paper was written?

4. On a 0-9 scale, what do you think this paper might receive?

Authors' Commentary & Assessment**Student Response 1:**

Though at first it seems that it will not be more than a lower-half response because the student spends most of her time simply paraphrasing the original passage, the student redeems herself at the essay's end when she suggests that the only thing that these so called "Great Men" can be lauded for is that they are such accomplished tricksters that they have fooled others into believing that they are, indeed, great. The student attempts to discuss the contradictions of the narrator, and she recognizes that there is significance to the double message that appears to underlie this passage; this latter point, however, she seems unable to put into words and thus does not pursue this very essential rhetorical element. Such responses—those that are strong in one area but fall short in another—frequently end up in the 5 range. This particular response is further injured by occasional deficiencies in clarity and fluency which some readers might penalize.

AP Score: 4-5**Student Response 2:**

It is immediately obvious that this student has a good understanding of Goldsmith's essay and his attitude toward "great men." Within the first paragraph the essay acknowledges the crux of the original—just what is a "great" man?; that because of the proliferation of this term, the author of the original essay is unsure of the validity of such a term when he hears it. This student response discusses only one major rhetorical technique employed by Goldsmith, specifically tone. Although the prompt does urge students to consider "rhetorical techniques," this response is so apt in its analysis that the essay cannot be overly penalized for this focus. Moreover, he does suggest that specific diction is also helpful in understanding the author's feelings.

Moreover, this student aptly supports what he has to say with appropriate details. He does not just throw in the detail as paraphrase, but uses such support to develop his response to the essay prompt. The essay response demonstrates this student's stylistic maturity with an effective command of sentence structure, diction, and organization. His vocabulary is strong and appropriately used. This paper shows good comprehension and maturity as well as strong, upper-half analytical skills.

AP Score: 7**Student Response 3:**

This is a good response to contrast with the first student response sample for this question. While the first sample is a very clever paraphrasing of the original essay, and therefore a lower half paper, this student response, although not brilliant, is certainly an upper-half effort. This student adequately

understands and addresses the author's attitude toward "great men" by recognizing the sardonic tone of the entire essay. The discussion of syntax, although not as successful as the discussion of tone, does touch upon some of the structural characteristics of the piece that make it what it is. The conclusion, on the other hand, is a disappointment. The mention of diction should have been avoided, and the brevity of this paragraph suggests that the student ran out of time. However, he would have been more successful to complete his discussion of tone and syntax rather than try to throw in a hasty reference to diction that he fails to pursue.

AP Score: 6