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Synthesis Question

Preparation for the AP Exam

Mark Mooney

Ann Pagani
"It's all tied together..."
Possible Topics for the Synthesis Question

1) Terrorism
2) Global warming
3) Freedom
4) Competition
5) Affirmative action
6) Cloning
7) Prejudice
8) Family
9) Love
10) Torture
11) Euthanasia
12) Obesity
13) Education
14) Reality shows
15) Marriage and divorce
16) Animal rights and research
17) Stem cell research
18) Driving safety and cell phones
19) Computers: advantages and dangers
20) Immigration
21) Capital punishment
22) Gun laws and lobbying
23) Advertising and body image
24) National health insurance
25) Standardized testing
26) Privacy
27) Art
28) Gender issues
29) Integrity
30) Ethics
31) Social security
32) Prison reform
33) Advertising
34) Illiteracy
35) Living will / Do not resuscitate

S. Council
English Language and Composition
Reading Time: 15 minutes
Suggested Writing Time: 40 minutes

Directions: The following prompt is based on the accompanying six sources.

This question requires you to integrate a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. Refer to the sources to support your position; avoid mere paraphrasing or summary. Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument.

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect citations.

Introduction

Television has been influential in United States presidential elections since the 1960's. But just what does it influence, and how does it affect who is elected? Has it made elections fairer and more accessible, or has it moved candidates closer to the people? The advent of television has given them a new, immediate contact with political events.

Assignment

Read the following sources (including any introductory information) carefully. Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least two of the sources for support, take a position that defines, challenges, or qualifies the claim that television has had a positive impact on presidential elections.

Refer to the sources as Source A, Source B, etc.; titles are included for your convenience.

Source A (Campbell)
Source B (Herb and Thrice)
Source C (Mendel)
Source D (Chart)
Source E (Razey)
Source F (Koppel)

The following passage is excerpted from an article about television's impact on politics.

The advent of television in the late 1940's gave rise to the belief that it was opening a new era for public communication. As Frank Stanton, president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, put it: "Not even the sky is the limit." One of the great contributions expected of television lay in its presumed capacity to inform and stimulate the political interests of the American electorate.

"Television, with its penetration, its wide geographic distribution and impact, provides a new, direct, and sensitive link between Washington and the people," said Dr. Stanton. "The people have not only become the nation, as they have not been since the days when we were small enough each to know his elected representative. As we grew, we lost this feeling of direct contact—television has now restored it."

As time has passed, events have seemed to give substance to this expectation. The televising of important congressional hearings, the national nominating conventions, and recently the Nixon-Kennedy and other debates have appeared to make a novel contribution to the political life of the nation. Large segments of the public have been given a new, immediate contact with political events. Television has appeared to be fulfilling its early promise.

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6 = 5 text docs / Graph
The following passage is excerpted from an online article that provides a timeline of major events when television and the presidency have intersected.

April 20, 1992: Not a historic date perhaps, but a suggestive one. It was on this date [while campaigning for President] that Bill Clinton discussed his underwear with the American people (briefly, but not exactly, as it turned out). Why would the leader of the free world undress himself like this? Who cares? In television's increasingly postmodern world, all texts—serious and sensational—are sifted together in the same discontinuous field of experience. To be sure, Mr. Clinton made his disclosure because he had been asked to do so by a member of the MTV generation, not because he felt a sudden need to purge himself. But in doing so Clinton exposed several rules connected to the new phenomenology of politics: (1) because of television's celebrity system, Presidents are losing their distinctiveness as social actors and heroes are often judged by standards formerly used to assess rock singers and movie stars; (2) because of television's sense of intimacy, the American people feel they know their Presidents as persons and hence no longer feel the need for party guidance; (3) because of the medium's ambivalent world view, those who watch politics on television are increasingly turning away from the policy sphere, years of hyperfamiliarity having finally bred contempt for politics itself.

Source B

The following passage is excerpted from a weekly literary and cultural magazine.

Holding a presidential election today without a television debate would seem almost undemocratic, as though voters were being cheated by the omission of some relevant test, some necessary submission to mass scrutiny.

That's not what many people thought at the time of the first debates. Theodore H. White, who subscribed fully to [John F.] Kennedy's view that the debates had made the difference in the election, complained, in The Making of the President 1960, that television had damaged the issues by forcing the candidates to respond to questions insensitively... He also believed that Kennedy's "victory" in the debates was largely a triumph of image over content. People who listened to the debates on the radio, White pointed out, scored it a draw; people who watched it thought that, except in the third debate, Kennedy had crushed [Richard M.] Nixon. (This little statistic has been repeated many times as proof of the distorting effects of television. Why not the polls and effects of radio?) It also may be that people whose medium of choice or opportunity in 1960 was radio tended to vote [for Nixon] rather than a Kennedy strategem, while those who watched television... Nixon's light-colored suit, wrong makeup, bad posture—was "flaunted." "In 1960 television had won the nation away from sound to images," he concluded, "and that was that."

... "Our national politics has become a competition for images or between images, rather than between ideals," [one commentator] concluded. "An effective President must be every year more concerned with projecting images of himself."

Source C
Source D

Source E

TELEVISION RATINGS FOR PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES: 1960-1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Networks</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Names (millions)</th>
<th>People (millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>ABC, CBS, NBC</td>
<td>Kennedy-Nixon</td>
<td>Sept. 26</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>NO DEBATES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>NO DEBATES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>ABC, CBS, NBC</td>
<td>Carter-Ford</td>
<td>Oct. 6</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>ABC, CBS, NBC</td>
<td>Anderson-Carter-Reagan</td>
<td>Oct. 28</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>ABC, CBS, NBC</td>
<td>Mondale-Reagan</td>
<td>Oct. 7</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>65.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN</td>
<td>Bush-Dukakis</td>
<td>Sept. 25</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>65.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN</td>
<td>Bush-Clinton-Perot</td>
<td>Oct. 11</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>62.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, FOX</td>
<td>Clinton-Dole</td>
<td>Oct. 3</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following passage is taken from a book that examines the relationship between politics in the United States and television.

In early 1968 [when President Lyndon Johnson was running for reelection], after five years of steadily increasing American commitment of troops and arms to the war in Vietnam, President Johnson was still holding fast to the policy that the war could and must be won. However, his favorite television newscaster, CBS's Walter Cronkite, became increasingly skeptical about the stream of official statements from Washington and Saigon that claimed we were winning the war. So Cronkite decided to go to Vietnam and see for himself. When he returned, he broadcast a special report to the nation, which Lyndon Johnson watched. Cronkite reported that the war had become a bloody stalemate and that military victory was not in the cards. He concluded: “It is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out... will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.”

On hearing Cronkite's verdict, the President turned to his aides and said, “It’s all over.” Johnson was a great believer in public opinion polls, and he knew that a recent poll had shown that the American people trusted Walter Cronkite more than any other American to “tell it the way it is.” Moreover, Johnson himself liked and respected Cronkite more than any other newscaster. As Johnson's aide Bill Moyers put it later, “We always knew... that Cronkite had more authority with the American people than anyone else. It was Johnson's instinct that Cronkite was right.” So if Walter Cronkite thought that the war was hopeless, the American people would think so too, and the only thing left was to wind it down. A few weeks after Cronkite's broadcast Johnson, in a famous broadcast of his own, announced that he was ending the air and naval bombardment in most of Vietnam—and that he would not run for another term as President.
The following reflections come from the printed journal of Ted Koppel, a newscaster who is best known for appearing on the news show Nightline.

All of us in commercial television are constrained by a difficult choice that commercialism imposes. Do we deliberately aim for the lowest common denominator, thereby assuring ourselves of the largest possible audience but producing exciting but cotton candy for the mind, or do we tackle the difficult subjects as creatively as we can, knowing that we may lose much of the mass audience? The good news is that even those simile low these days are failing, more often than not, to get good ratings.

It is after midnight and we have just finished our Nightline program on the first Republican presidential "debate" involving all of the candidates. It is a joke to call an event like the one that transpired tonight a debate. Two reporters sat and asked questions of one or the candidates after another. Each man was supposed to answer only the question he was asked, and was given a minute and thirty seconds in which to do so. Since the next candidate would then be asked another question altogether, it was an act of rhetorical contortion for one man to address himself to what one of his rivals had said...

Because we were able to pull the best three or four minutes out of the ninety-minute event, Nightline made the whole thing look pretty good. That's the ultimate irony.

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AP English Language and Composition 2005-2006 Workshop Materials
4. Inadequate

Essays earning a score of 4 identify and take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that television has had a positive impact on presidential elections. They attempt to present an argument and support their position by synthesizing and citing at least two sources but may misunderstand, misrepresent, or completely alter their own argument of the sources they include. The link between the argument and the cited sources is weak. The prose of 4 essays may suggest immaturity control of writing.

3. Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for the score of 4 but demonstrate less understanding of the cited sources, less success in developing their own position, or less control of writing.

2. Little Success

Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate little success in taking a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that television has had a positive impact on presidential elections. They may merely allude to knowledge gained from reading the sources rather than citing the sources themselves. These essays may mislead the sources, fail to present an argument, or substitute a simple task by merely responding to the question tangentially or by summarizing the sources. The prose of essays scored a 2 often demonstrates consistent weaknesses in writing, such as a lack of development or organization, grammatical problems, or a lack of control.

1. Essays earning a score of 1 meet the criteria for the score of 2 but are especially simplistic or weak in their control of writing or do not cite even one source.

0. Essays earning a score of zero (0) are off-topic responses that receive no credit, such as those that merely repeat the prompt.

- Essays earning a dash (—) are blank responses or responses that are completely off topic.
Mr. Mooney/Mrs. Pagani/Ms. Gaughen
AP Composition

Synthesis Question Research Project

Your task is to develop your own synthesis question. Find 7 sources, 1 of which must be a graphic such as a chart or political cartoon. Use the 2006 experimental synthesis question as your model. Select one of the topics from the list provided and then narrow that topic to something interesting, narrow in scope, and intelligent. The prompt must state a "claim" and involve taking a "position" that "supports, defends, or challenges" that claim.

The directions will be the same (verbatim).

You need to write a precise and clear introduction: start with a fact that is important to the introduction of your topic. Then end with 1-2 thought-provoking questions.

Next, you need to craft a precise and lucid "Assignment" portion of the synthesis essay – all of roughly the same length. The assignment portion is the prompt; this is the most important section of the synthesis question project. This is the writer's task.

For the 7 sources, you must cite them at the top of each source using MLA format just as ETS has done for you in the model. (Source A, Source B, etc.) Each source should be less than 275 words or carefully cut so that it fits this length requirement. Your sources should include multiple perspectives on the issue, just as the 6 sources in the TV debates prompt did. Remember, the AP test taker only gets 15 minutes to read and mark up the introduction, the assignment, and all 7 sources.

The prompt should be your 1st page, and source A should be your 2nd page, etc. until you have 8 pages, and a total of 7 sources. (Remember, for the purpose of the exam in May, you do not have to incorporate all 7 sources into your essay; you are only required to incorporate 3 of them.)

Here is a quick review on sources:
- 1 source is a cartoon, chart, or other graphic
- 1 source should come from a literary or cultural magazine (ex. The Atlantic Monthly or The New Yorker)
- 1 source should come from a book on your topic
- 1 source could come from an on-line article
- 1 source could come from a printed transcript from the media (ex. transcript from a BBC show)
- 2 other sources of your choice