

2008 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS (Form B)

Question 2

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

Read the following passage from “America Needs Its Nerds” by Leonid Fridman. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Fridman develops his argument.

There is something very wrong with the system of values in a society that has only derogatory terms like nerd and geek for the intellectually curious and academically serious.

Line 5 A geek, according to *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, is a street performer who shocks the public by biting off heads of live chickens. It is a telling fact about our language and our culture that someone dedicated to pursuit of knowledge is
10 compared to a freak biting the head off a live chicken.

Even at a prestigious academic institution like Harvard, anti-intellectualism is rampant: Many students are ashamed to admit, even to their friends, how much they study. Although most students try
15 to keep up their grades, there is a minority of undergraduates for whom pursuing knowledge is the top priority during their years at Harvard. Nerds are ostracized while athletes are idolized.

The same thing happens in U.S. elementary and
20 high schools. Children who prefer to read books rather than play football, prefer to build model airplanes rather than get wasted at parties with their classmates, become social outcasts. Ostracized for their intelligence and refusal to conform to society’s
25 anti-intellectual values, many are deprived of a chance to learn adequate social skills and acquire good communication tools.

Enough is enough.

30 Nerds and geeks must stop being ashamed of who they are. It is high time to face the persecutors who haunt the bright kid with thick glasses from

kindergarten to the grave. For America’s sake, the anti-intellectual values that pervade our society must be fought.

35 There are very few countries in the world where anti-intellectualism runs as high in popular culture as it does in the U.S. In most industrialized nations, not least of all our economic rivals in East Asia, a kid who studies hard is lauded and held up as an example
40 to other students.

In many parts of the world, university professorships are the most prestigious and materially rewarding positions. But not in America, where average professional ballplayers are much more
45 respected and better paid than faculty members of the best universities.

How can a country where typical parents are ashamed of their daughter studying mathematics instead of going dancing, or of their son reading
50 Weber* while his friends play baseball, be expected to compete in the technology race with Japan or remain a leading political and cultural force in Europe? How long can America remain a world-class power if we constantly emphasize social skills and physical
55 prowess over academic achievement and intellectual ability?

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* Maximilian Weber (1864–1920), German political economist and sociologist