

Mock 1 RA 2026 C

The following passage is biologist Hope Jahren's prologue to her 2016 memoir *Lab Girl*. A prologue is an introduction that provides background information to set the context for a literary work. Jahren uses this prologue to give a basic understanding of the kind of work she does and why she considers it to be important. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Jahren makes to convey the message of the importance of her work.

Par.

1 People love the ocean. People are always asking me why I don't study the ocean, because, after all, I live in Hawaii. I tell them that it's because the ocean is a lonely, empty place. There is six hundred times more life on land than there is in the ocean, and this fact mostly comes down to plants. The average ocean plant is one cell that lives for about twenty days. The average land plant is a two-ton tree that lives for more than one hundred years. The mass ratio of plants to animals in the ocean is close to four, while the ratio on land is closer to a thousand. Plant numbers are staggering: there are eighty billion trees just within the protected forests of the western United States. The ratio of trees to people in America is well over two hundred. As a rule, people live among plants but they don't really see them. Since I've discovered these numbers, I can see little else.

2 So humor me for a minute, and look out your window.

3 What did you see? You probably saw things that people make. These include other people, cars, buildings, and sidewalks. After just a few years of design, engineering, mining, forging, digging, welding, bricklaying, window-framing, spackling, plumbing, wiring, and painting, people can make a hundred-story skyscraper capable of casting a thousand-foot shadow. It's really impressive.

4 Now look again.

5 Did you see something green? If you did, you saw one of the few things left in the world that people cannot make. What you saw was invented more than four hundred million years ago near the equator. Perhaps you were lucky enough to see a tree. That tree was designed about three hundred million years ago. The mining of the atmosphere, the cell-laying, the wax-spackling, plumbing, and pigmentation took a few months at most, giving rise to nothing more or less perfect than a leaf. There are about as many leaves on one tree as there are hairs on your head. It's really impressive.

6 Now focus your gaze on just one leaf.

7 People don't know how to make a leaf, but they know how to destroy one. In the last ten years, we've cut down more than fifty billion trees. One-third of the Earth's land used to be covered in forest. Every ten years, we cut down about 1 percent of this total forest, never to be regrown. That represents a land area about the size of France. One France after another, for decades, has been wiped from the globe. That's more than one trillion leaves that are ripped from their source of nourishment every single day. And it seems like nobody cares. But we should care. We should care for the same basic reason that we are always bound to care: because someone died who didn't have to.

8 Someone died?

9 Maybe I can convince you. I look at an awful lot of leaves. I look at them and I ask questions. I start by looking at the color: Exactly what shade of green? Top different from the bottom? Center different from the edges? And what about the edges? Smooth? Toothed? How hydrated is the leaf? Limp? Wrinkled? Flush? What is the angle between the leaf and stem? How big is the leaf? Bigger than my hand? Smaller than my fingernail? Edible? Toxic? How much sun does it get? How often does the rain hit it? Sick? Healthy? Important? Irrelevant? Alive? Why?

10 Now *you* ask a question about *your* leaf.

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11 Guess what? You are now a scientist. People will tell you that you have to know math to be a scientist, or physics or chemistry. They're wrong. That's like saying you have to know how to knit to be a housewife, or that you have to know Latin to study the Bible. Sure, it helps, but there will be time for that. What comes first is a question, and you're already there. It's not nearly as involved as people make it out to be.

12 So let me tell you some stories, one scientist to another.

1. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Jahren makes to convey the message of the importance of her work.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer's rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Row A - Thesis

Select a point value to view scoring criteria, decision rules, and scoring notes, and to score the response.

Notes for this rubric row:

- The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity.
- The thesis may be anywhere within the response.
- For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that *could* be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point.
- The thesis *may* establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn't do so to earn the thesis point.
- A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning.



0	1
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The response responds to the prompt with a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer's rhetorical choices.

Responses that do not earn this point:

- Only restate the prompt.
- Fail to address the rhetorical choices the writer of the passage makes.

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· Describe or repeat the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense.

Examples that do not earn this point:

Restate the prompt

- *“Jahren uses the passage to give a basic understanding of the kind of work she does and to explain why it is important.”*
- *“The passage is used to show the audience that Jahren’s work is important.”*

Make a claim, but do not address the writer’s rhetorical choices

- *“Jahren uses her prologue to explain why she is more interested in the land than in the ocean.”*

Repeat provided information from the passage

- *“According to Jahren, anyone can be a scientist.”*

Responses that earn this point:

· Respond to the prompt rather than restate or rephrase the prompt and clearly articulate a defensible thesis about the rhetorical choices Jahren makes to convey her message about the importance of her work.

Examples that earn this point:

Present a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices

- *“Jahren gives the reader instructions and addresses the reader as ‘a scientist’ to present her work as interesting, important, and accessible to readers who don’t necessarily have a scientific background.”*
- *“Using extended parallels between human activities and the activities of nature, Jahren encourages her audience to recognize the importance of the natural processes she studies.”*

Row B – Evidence and Commentary

Select a point value to view scoring criteria, decision rules, and scoring notes, and to score the response.

Notes for this rubric row:

- Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row.
- To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same rhetorical choice if each instance further contributes to the argument, purpose, or message of the passage.



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The response demonstrates all of the following:

- Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning [EVIDENCE]

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- Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning [COMMENTARY]
- Explains how multiple rhetorical choices in the passage contribute to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message [COMMENTARY]

Typical responses that earn 4 points:

- Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.
- Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument.
- Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained.
- Explain how the writer’s use of rhetorical choices contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage.

Row C – Sophistication

Select a point value to view scoring criteria, decision rules, and scoring notes, and to score the response.

Notes for this rubric row:

- This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference.



0	1
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The response demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.

Responses that do not earn this point:

- Attempt to contextualize the text, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“*In a world where...*” OR “*Since the beginning of time...*”).
- Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“*While some may argue that...*” OR “*Some people say...*”).
- Examine individual rhetorical choices but do not examine the relationships among different choices throughout the passage.
- Oversimplify complexities in the passage.
- Use complicated or complex sentences or language that are ineffective because they do not enhance their analysis.

Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following:

1. Explaining the significance or relevance of the writer’s rhetorical choices (given the rhetorical situation).
2. Explaining a purpose or function of the passage’s complexities or tensions.

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3. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
