

Some Concerns about Scores

from the AP English Electronic Discussion Group

---- Original Message--

What do I need to do as a teacher [to get the scores to go up each year]? I'm not totally responsible for the scores; however, I know I am a piece of the puzzle. Thanks for your help - guidance. I'll accept any form: bulleted lists, etc...

Your scores will not go up every year unless you start really low and be sure to improve only slightly each time. My scores this year were worse than last year's, too. Like you, I want to be better next year than I was this year.

Do not beat yourself up, though, over lower scores unless you intentionally neglected or sabotaged your students. Others on the list will come through with good suggestions. Here is just a part of my list... once I start it you'll be able to add to it easily. I don't mean this to be as facetious as it sounds; the items here can make a significant difference.

Be sure your students:

- have had practice with multiple choice questions
- have not had an argument with a parent within 72 hours
- have had practice writing essays
- have an adequate diet and get enough sleep
- are not worried someone's going to find out about _____ (fill in the blank)
- have learned to read with some perception and appreciation
- are in nearly perfect health
- have no family members or pets with illnesses or emotional problems
- are not worried about other AP exams coming up later in the week
- have not had a fight with a boy/girlfriend within the past week
- have no friends who have just found out they're pregnant
- do not have an older brother or sister who got a 5 on this AP test
- have no nagging religious or philosophical doubts
- know they're going to be able to go to college and how they will pay for it
- and on, and on....

and, above all

- are not adolescents

Cheers,
Skip Nicholson

--- Original Message -

I'm feeling very upset and extremely disappointed [with scores]. It's not a good way to start the school year in a few weeks.

If your kids had scored far beyond your expectations on the exam, would you claim it was all your doing? even privately?

I'm trying to encourage you not to blame yourself, but can I get rough for a minute? If your only measure of the success of your course is the exam score, then you're probably right to be "very upset and extremely disappointed." But if you work to make your class an enjoyable experience for your students, if you try to change the way they read and think about their reading, if you try to get them to establish habits about reading and about talking and writing about their reading -- habits they will carry into, through, and out of college, if your kids learn to challenge each other, to probe, to dig, and to laugh... if any of these operate in your class, then you are wrong to be discouraged. Disappointed that the system sometimes doesn't produce the results we think it should, OK. Disappointed that on that day, that exam didn't fit those kids, yes. Disappointed in yourself and them, no.

The exam is not the course.

One more way to look at it: You know your kids and what they did during the year. Would you feel comfortable using the AP exam scores as their final grades? Give the 5s an A, the 4s a B, the 3s a C, and the 2s a D? Would those grades reflect your evaluation of their knowledge, performance, and habits? If you would feel good throwing out all their other work and your professional judgement and using only those scores, may I suggest, with some honest respect but with some insistence too, that you probably should not be teaching AP.

If you wanted things to work out better this year, you are welcome to join my new club. Last year my kids' scores were exceptionally high. I did not take the credit, not even in conversations with myself. This year my kids' scores were not what I hoped. I do not accept "the blame." (I don't even accept that there's "blame" to be doled out.) Your reasoning, though, suggests that you would blame me. You wouldn't really would you? If not, you can't blame yourself either. Fair enough?

Hang in there.

Cheers,
Skip Nicholson