



Writing the AP Exam

The 'Triple Eight':
A System for Higher Scores

Advanced Placement Summer Institute

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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, they 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

CALCULATING THE AP EXAM SCORE

PRE-DETERMINED:

Total points possible = 150

Essay section = 55% (82.5 points)

Multiple-choice section = 45% (67.5 points)

Essay section					
TOTAL		Each Essay		Each point (on the 9-point scale)	
<i>points</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>points</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>points</i>	<i>percent</i>
82.5	55 %	27.5	18 %	3.0556	2.04 %

Multiple-choice section					
TOTAL		Each passage*		Each question	
<i>points</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>points</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>points</i>	<i>percent</i>
67.5	45 %	13.5	9 %	1.2272	.818 %
		* assumes, <i>incorrectly</i> , that all passages count equally			



AP EXAM SCORE ESTIMATES

SECTION I: MULTIPLE-CHOICE:

$$\frac{\text{number correct}}{\text{number correct}} \times 1.2272 = \text{Weighted Section I score}$$

SECTION II: ESSAYS:

Question 1: $\frac{\text{out of 9}}{\text{out of 9}} \times 3.0556 =$

Question 1: $\frac{\text{out of 9}}{\text{out of 9}} \times 3.0556 =$

Question 1: $\frac{\text{out of 9}}{\text{out of 9}} \times 3.0556 =$

SUM of three essay scores: _____

Weighted Section II score

COMPOSITE SCORE:

$$\text{Weighted Section I score} + \text{Weighted Section II score} = \text{Composite Score}$$

114 – 150	5
98 – 113	4
81 – 97	3
53 – 80	2
0 – 52	1

AP EXAM SCORE ESTIMATE

1. Multiply the number of correct answers by 1.2272. That gives you your “weighted section 1 score.” **(The factor 1.2272 assumes there are 55 multiple-choice questions. If there are not, divide 67.5 by the number of questions to get this factor.)*
2. Add together the scores (out of 9) on your three essays That gives you your “weighted section 2 score.”
3. Add together your two weighted scores. That number is your composite score.
4. The “cut points” between grades vary from year to year, but you can use this table to find the grade you would have received using these typical figures.



AP English Study Skills

How to Prepare for AP English Examinations

You've been studying for years, almost since the days you got out of Dr. Seuss books. Is there some new, exotic set of study skills you need to do well in Advanced Placement courses and exams? No...and yes. No, because the general skills of reading and writing you've gained are fundamental for advanced work. Yes, because AP courses are at a college level. They require more complex skills at a higher level of difficulty.

Following is a quick study primer with tips on reading and writing, as well as preparing for AP English Examinations.

Reading

In AP English, you may feel you have never been given so much to read. AP English demands plenty of serious reading, and you might be tempted to "speed-read." You may try to scan paragraphs and pages as fast as you can while hunting for main ideas. In a word: Don't. First, main ideas usually aren't quickly accessible from "speed-reading" complex texts.

Also, if you race through good writing, you are likely to miss the subtlety and complexity. A paragraph of text by Frederick Douglass or Joyce Carol Oates, a poem by Auden, or a drama by Shakespeare cannot be appreciated—or even minimally understood—without careful, often-repeated readings.

In reading your AP assignments, keep in mind to:

- Read slowly
- Reread complex and important sentences
- Ask yourself often, "What does this sentence, paragraph, speech, stanza, or chapter mean?"

Make Your Reading Efficient

How can you balance the careful reading AP English requires with your demanding chemistry and calculus workloads, plus get in play practice, soccer games, and whatever else you've got on your busy schedule? We've compiled some helpful tips to make your AP reading more efficient, fun, and productive.

Get a head start. Obtain copies of as many assigned texts as you can. Then you won't waste time searching for a text when you absolutely need it.

➤ Preview important reading assignments.

By previewing, you carefully note:

- the exact title
- the author's name
- the table of contents
- the preface or introduction—this section often states the author's purpose and themes
- in essays and certain types of prose, the final paragraph(s).

➤ Pause to consider the author's principal ideas and the material the author uses to support them.

Such ideas may be fairly easy to identify in writings of critical essayists or journalists, but much more subtle in the works of someone like Virginia Woolf or Emily Dickinson.

➤ Know the context of a piece of writing.

This technique will help you read with greater understanding and better recollection. A knowledge of the period in which the authors lived and wrote enhances your understanding of what they have tried to say and how well they succeeded. When you read John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, find other sources to learn about the horrible conditions for migrant laborers in California in the 1930s.

➤ Read text aloud.

Slow down when you are having trouble with poetry or important passages, and read them aloud. You can more easily determine tone, for example.

➤ Reread difficult material to help you understand it.

Complex issues and elegant expression are not always easily caught on a first reading. Form the habit of consulting your dictionary, the thesaurus, the encyclopedia, the atlas, and the globe. Through these resources, you'll discover new ideas and knowledge. Lots of high-quality computer software is available, too.

To understand and appreciate much of English and American literature, you should have some acquaintance with the major themes of Judaic and Christian religious traditions and with Greek and Roman mythology. These religious concepts and stories have influenced and informed first English and then American literary traditions from the Middle Ages through modern times.

If you are studying Literature and Composition, you should also study extensively several representative works from various genres and periods from the Renaissance forward. You are advised to concentrate on works of recognized literary merit, worthy of scrutiny because of their richness of thought and language.

Writing

Writing is central to both AP English courses and examinations. Both courses have but two goals, to provide you with opportunities to become skilled, mature, critical readers and practiced, logical, clear, and honest writers.

In AP English, writing is taught as “process”—that is, thinking, planning, drafting the text, reviewing, discussing, redrafting, editing, polishing, and finishing. It’s also important that AP students learn to write “on call” or “on demand.” Learning to write critical or expository essays on call takes time and practice.

Here are some key guidelines to remember in learning to write a critical essay:

- *Make use of the text given to you to analyze.*
- *Quote judiciously from it to support your observations.*
- *Be logical in your exposition of ideas.*
- *Use evidence from the text to strengthen your analysis.*

If you acquire these skills—organizing ideas, marshalling evidence, being logical in analysis, and using the text judiciously—you should have little trouble writing your essays on the AP Examination. Practice in other kinds of writing—narrative, argument, exposition, and personal writing—all have their place alongside practice in writing on demand.

As you study and practice writing, you’ll want to consider the following points.

Your reading directly influences your writing skills and habits. If you sat down and read the complete three-volume edition of Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and wrote a paper about it, your writing style would probably take on the sound of Gibbon’s with great series of elegant phrases and clauses and an elevated, lofty tone. Read with omnivorous relish and you won’t even have to be taught how to write. It will come naturally.

Writing at its best is great fun. When you have penned what you think is a great sentence or clean, logical paragraph, read it over to yourself out loud. Enjoy it. Delight in the ideas, savor the diction, and let the phrases and clauses roll around in your mind. Claim it as part of your self. You will discover you have a voice worthy of respect.

Take a tip from E. M. Forster. He is reputed to have said that he never knew clearly what it was he thought until he spoke it; and once he had said it, he never knew clearly what it was that he said until he had written it down. Then, Forster noted, he could play with it and give it final form. Be like Forster: think, speak, write, analyze your writing, give it final shape.

Think of grammar, mechanics, and rhetoric as tools, aids, props. Think of them as elements that you can order to clean up your ideas, to sharpen your statements, to make your words and sentences glisten and stick.

Get well-acquainted with the vocabulary. Writers and critical readers have a “technical vocabulary” they use when

talking about language, drama, poetry, and fiction. Compile a list of such words. Notice writing that uses the right vocabulary and why. Words you should already know include: *syntax, tone, rhetoric, attitude, antecedent, denouement, exposition, climax, atmosphere, voice, speaker, stock character, thesis, ideology, persuasion, paradox, allusion, ambivalence, syllogism, and aphorism.*

When writing, think about audience. Your teachers may specify an audience that you are supposed to keep in mind when writing a paper. Most of us in daily life are not writing for a particular person or audience, but rather for someone called “the general reader.” The general reader is someone, anyone, who possesses an average intelligence and has a fairly sound general education. This general reader is interested in the events of the day and in the world as a whole. He or she has a good measure of sympathy for humankind, appreciates the happy as well as the unhappy accidents of life. This reader also is blessed with a good sense of humor and the ability to listen to others, to writers like you in fact. Keep the general reader in mind when you write.

How to Prepare for AP English Examinations

During your AP English course, your teacher will probably assess how well you and your fellow students are mastering important knowledge and skills. Your teacher will gather this information through questions and quizzes, class reports, projects or papers, and, of course, tests.

Besides these teacher-prepared assessments, the Advanced Placement Program provides a standardized final exam in May. Unlike most exams prepared and graded by your teachers, the AP English Examination allows you to miss or omit quite a few questions on the multiple-choice section and still receive a good grade.

Keeping up with course work, regular study, and periodic review of major elements in the course constitute the best preparation for taking tests. If you want to master your AP course, remember that material you review periodically and skills you reinforce by practice are far more likely to remain with you than are those that you try to acquire all at once in a brief time period.

But what about Exam Day, what to do if you have sweaty palms and your mind is darting from Auden to Hurston to Wharton quicker than the dash between class and school lockers? Here are some strategies for Exam Day. The first three apply to most exams you might take. The remainder refer specifically to AP Exams.

Pay close attention to directions. Not paying enough attention to test directions can hurt your grade. Remember:

If your teacher says, “Answer one of the three questions in section one and all of the questions in section two,” and you reverse the directions, the grade you receive on the test will probably not reflect accurately what you know about the topics. On the AP Exams, phrases in the multiple-choice

sections like “All the following are . . . EXCEPT” or “Which of the following does NOT . . .” contain critical words. If you don’t pay attention to them, you will not respond correctly to the questions. If you tend to be very nervous during a major exam, it’s especially important to concentrate on the spoken and written directions.

Be careful about the sequence on answer sheets for multiple-choice tests. Even the most experienced test taker can make the critical mistake of getting responses out of sequence. If you’re not careful, you may mark an answer for question 5 when the answer was intended for question 6. This can happen easily when you skip a question. Put a mark in your test book (not on your answer sheet) when you bypass a question. Frequently check to be sure that the number of the question on your answer sheet corresponds to the number of the question in your exam booklet.

Use smart strategies to handle the time limits. Virtually all classroom and standardized tests have time limits. Skilled test takers make a quick estimate of the amount of time the various questions or sections of a test will require and stay aware of the time available throughout the test and concentrate on questions they can respond to best.

On the multiple-choice section of the AP Examinations, for example, you should note the number of questions and the time allotted to them. Move on to the next question if you can’t figure out the answer to the one you are working on. Use all the time available for the AP Examinations. If you finish the exam with time to spare, go back to questions you skipped or answers that you can supplement.

Know the probability for educated guessing. AP Examinations have a scoring adjustment to correct for random guessing. For questions with five answer choices, one-fourth of a point is subtracted for each wrong answer. So if you know absolutely nothing that helps you eliminate even one of the multiple-choice options, you probably won’t come out ahead by guessing at an answer. But if you are fairly sure that even one of the options is wrong, it may be worthwhile to answer the question. Of course, if you can eliminate two or three options as probably incorrect, your chances of gaining credit become even greater.

Specific Strategies for the Free-Response Section

When you are taking the free-response section of the AP English Examinations, be sure to understand what each essay question is asking you to do and then make sure that you answer the question that is asked. Do not write on a topic other than the assigned one.

Your essays will be evaluated on the completeness and the quality of your response to the question. The quality of your response includes both the quality of what you say and the skill with which you say it—the quality of your writing. The best answers will be both perceptive and well-written.

Here are some pointers concerning free-response questions:

- *Know your time limits. Remember that your time on the free-response questions is limited. Plan your answer carefully. Think about the major points that you want to make and the evidence you plan to include to support these statements.*
- *Before you start writing your essay, be sure that you understand the passage or poem (if there is one).*
- *Preparation works. Although the English teachers who score the free-response section will generally be sympathetic if you revise your first reading or understanding of a passage as you write your answer, more preparation early on could save you the need to revise your thinking in the middle of your response.*
- *Substance counts. You need to write enough to answer the question fully and to make your ideas convincing by supporting them with specific details. Long answers are not necessarily the best answers, but answers that are very sketchy or filled with unsupported generalizations usually do not receive the highest scores. In the time allowed for each question, AP English students are usually able to write several substantial paragraphs and to develop their critical analysis at some length.*
- *Take care with revisions. Because of the time limitation in the free-response section, you will not be able to write a rough draft and then recopy your answer. However, space is provided in the exam booklet and in the response booklet to make notes and/or to outline your answer. As you write your essay, you can cross out words and sentences and even insert a part or move it from one section to another.*
- *Try to save a little time for reviewing your essay so that you can edit or revise it slightly. Make sure that any changes you make are clearly marked and legible and that any parts you want to delete are carefully crossed out.*
- *Is it natural for you to be very nervous about the AP English Exam? Yes. It’s understandable to be anxious when you are about to do something on which others will judge your performance. For most people, knowledge is the great moderator of anxiety. The more you know in advance about a course or an exam, the less you will worry.*
- *Knowing about an exam means understanding what kinds of questions you will be asked, how the exam will be graded, how much time you’ll have to respond, and so on. Knowing that you are prepared in terms of the exam’s content is probably the most calming knowledge of all. Consistent study, frequent review, and diligent practice throughout the course will powerfully support you for daily classroom learning and for taking tests.*

Counting Down to the Exam

Exam Tips: English Literature



Observations of the Chief Faculty Consultant

The Chief Faculty Consultant, Gale Larson, provided the following advice after the 2001 AP Reading:



- Tell students to read the prompt of each question very carefully. To think about the implications of the question, to begin thinking about how they will organize their responses, and to focus on what is asked of them are all important strategies in beginning the writing task.
- Often, students are asked to select a play or a novel to answer a particular question. Make sure they know that the work they have selected should be appropriate to the question asked. See to it that students have a fair range of readings that they feel familiar with, ones with which they can test the implications of the question and make the decision of the appropriateness of the work to the question asked. Without this flexibility they may force an answer that will come across as canned to the AP faculty consultant.
- Remind students to enter into the text itself, to supply concrete illustrations that substantiate the points they are making. Have them take command of what they are writing with authority by means of direct quotation of pertinent information from the text, always writing into the question and never away from it. Help them to keep their point of view consistent, to select appropriate material for supporting evidence, and to write in a focused and succinct manner.
- Remind your students that films are not works of literature and cannot be used to provide the kind of literary analysis required on the exam.
- Advise your students that, when starting an essay, they should avoid engaging in a mechanical repetition of the prompt and then supplying a list of literary devices. Instead, get them to think of ways to integrate the language of literature with the content of that literature, making connections that are meaningful and telling, engaging in analysis that leads to the synthesis of new ideas. Pressure them into using higher levels of critical thinking; have them go beyond the obvious and search for a more penetrating relationship of ideas. Make them see connections that they missed on their first reading of the text.

Find more at “AP Central,” www.apcentral.collegeboard.com

“What AP Readers Long to See”

This list was compiled during the 1994 AP English Reading at Trinity University in San Antonio.

1. Read the prompt. It hurts to give a low score to someone who misread the prompt but wrote a good essay.
2. Do everything the prompt asks. Most writers focus on a few strategies and never fully answer the question.
3. Think before you write. Which strategies are used and how do they answer the prompt?
4. Plan your response. It is not easy for the reader to pick over an essay attempting to decipher sentences. A little organization will help you avoid extensive editing.
5. Make a strong first impression. Build your opening response. Don't parrot the prompt word for word. The reader knows it from memory.
6. Begin your response immediately. Do not take a circuitous route with generalizations.
7. Be thorough and specific. Do not simply “point out” strategies. Explain how they are used, give examples, and show how they establish what the question is asking. No long quotes!
8. Use clear transitions that help the reader follow the ideas in your essays. Keep your paragraphs organized; do not digress.
9. Resist putting in a “canned” quotation or critic's comment if it does not fit. You will get a response from your reader but it will not be the one you want.
10. Write to express, not to impress. Keep vocabulary and syntax within your zone of competence. Students who inflate their writing often inadvertently entertain, but seldom explain.
11. Demonstrate that you understand style. Show the reader how the author has developed the selection to create the desired effect. This indicates that you understand the intricacies of the creative process.
12. Maintain an economy of language, saying much with few words. The best student writers see much, but say it quite succinctly. Often ideas are embedded rather than listed.
13. Let your writing dance with ideas and insights. You can receive a 6 or a 7 with a lockstep approach, but the essays that earn 8's and 9's expand to a wider perspective.
14. Write legibly. If a reader cannot read half the words, you will not get a fair reading—even if your essay is passed on to a reader with keener eyesight.
15. Let your work stand on its own merits. Avoid penning “pity me” notes to the reader (“I was up all night.” “I have a cold,” etc.).

The Advanced Placement Reading

This list was compiled during the 1994 AP English Reading at Trinity University in San Antonio and has been edited to reflect changes through Readings in Daytona Beach and Louisville.

1. DEVELOPING THE EXAM

- Before the exam a small group of experienced readers and college professors select literature and create appropriate questions
- The questions are subsequently field-tested with groups of freshman English students in colleges and universities around the U.S. and are then reexamined and refined for validity.

2. THE AP READING PROCESS

- After the exam, the Test Development Committee and exam leadership meet to select potential sample essays.
- The table leaders arrive one day prior to the start of the reading to validate, refine, and even challenge scores. Samples to be used by all readers are selected and sequenced.
- Readers are broken into three large groups—one for each question, and question leaders are introduced.
- Readers are further divided into tables consisting of one table leader and six, seven, or eight readers.
- The first morning (and sometimes part of the afternoon) is dedicated to training readers using pre-selected samples and scoring guides.

- Then each reader receives a packet with a scoring sheet and twenty-five exams, which they read and record in numerical order. When finished, readers turn in packet for new one. (This goes on forever or seven days, whichever comes first.) Table leader checks by “reading behind” new readers and reading selected samples from all readers throughout at least the first several days and usually the entire reading.
- Every session (even after breaks and lunch) begin with “normed” readings which diminish as the week progresses.
- The chief reader and question leaders offer inspiration and humor.

3. THE READING ATMOSPHERE

- Friendly, collegial, academic, enlightening
- Many activities—both intellectual and inane: poetry/fiction readings, symposia, dances, receptions, sports, tours, etc.
- Plenty of food, great conversation and opportunities for insight as well as inspiration and exchange of ideas.

READERS

- About 50% college instructors, 50% AP teachers.
- Remarkable egalitarian spirit—nobody tries to “pull rank.”

A D V A N C E D P L A C E M E N T E N G L I S H

The “Card Trick”

Begin now keeping a “deck of cards,” one for each work you see or read. Use 4 x 6 or 3 x 5 cards; choose a size that works for you. On the front of the card record the following information:

- o the author (last name first for alphabetizing)
- o the title
- o the type of literature (play, novel, story...)
- o the year of writing
- o the setting (time and place)
- o the names of the main characters and their relationship to each other
- o the plot line (in two or three sentences)
- o the theater, date of performance, and director (for a play or movie)

On the back, record

- o a brief reaction (brief, here, means one sentence)
- o questions you have
- o a memorable line or two
- o another work of literature (or art or music) to which you see some relation

Major Work Data Page

Writer/Nationality

Date/Movement

Organization

Point of View *(Why?)*

Symbol/Sustained Allusion

Ambiguity/Irony

Theme/"Meanings of the work as a whole"

Style

Tone

Plot/Story

Characters

Setting(s)

Related works *(literature, fine art, music...)*

Something Else

AP Exam Review: Chart of Major Works

Title, Author Type, Date, Country	Topic Theme, Ideas	Character	Setting, Atmosphere	Style, Language & Symbol	Links to other works	Quotes
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SAMPLE:

<i>Death of a Salesman</i> Arthur Miller play (tragedy) U.S. 1950s	The American Dream Worth of the individual	Willy Loman Linda, Biff, Happy Ben (in flashbacks) Charley, Bernard	Brooklyn (claustrophobic) Loman home, restaurant Flashbacks in Boston	Flute, cars, stockings, Ben, Alaska, refrigerator	Unrealized dreams (<i>Streetcar</i>) Tragic hero (Willy vs. Oedipus, Hamlet)	"Attention must finally be paid to this man."
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Review materials in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature, 8th ed.*

304-307	123-128	182-184	339-344, 270-273
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PRACTICE:

<i>Portrait of the Artist...</i> James Joyce Novel Ireland, 20th c.						
Twelfth Night Shakespeare Play (comedy) England 1601						

QUESTION 3 PROMPTS: 21st Century

2000

Many works of literature not readily identified with the mystery or detective story genre nonetheless involve the investigation of a mystery. In these works, the solution to the mystery may be less important than the knowledge gained in the process of its investigation. Choose a novel or play in which one or more of the characters confront a mystery. Then write an essay in which you identify the mystery and explain how the investigation illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2001

One definition of madness is “mental delusion or the eccentric behavior arising from it.” But Emily Dickinson wrote

Much madness is divinest Sense—

To a discerning Eye—

Novelist and playwrights have often seen madness with a “discerning Eye.” Select a novel or a play in which a character’s apparent madness or irrational behavior plays an important role. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain what this delusion or eccentric behavior consists of and how it might be judged reasonable. Explain the significance of the “madness” to the work

2002

Morally ambiguous characters—characters whose behavior discourages readers from identifying them as purely evil or purely good—are at the heart of many works of literature. Choose a novel or play in which a morally ambiguous character plays a pivotal role. Then write an essay in which you explain how the character can be viewed as morally ambiguous and why his or her moral ambiguity is significant to the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

2003

According to critic Northrop Frye, “tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning.”

Select a novel or play in which a tragic figure functions as an instrument of the suffering of others. Then write an essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by that figure contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole.

2004

Critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.” Choose a novel or play and, considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers any answers.

Explain how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

2005

In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), protagonist Edna Pontellier is said to possess “that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.” In a novel or play that you have studied, identify a character who conforms outwardly while questioning inwardly. Then write an essay in which you analyze how this tension between outward conformity and inward questioning contributes to the meaning of the work. Avoid mere plot summary.

2006

Many writers use a country setting to establish values within a work of literature. For example, the country may be a place of virtue and peace or one of primitivism and ignorance. Choose a novel or play in which such a setting plays a significant role. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the country setting functions in the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2007

In many works of literature, past events can affect, positively or negatively, the present actions, attitudes, or values of a character. Choose a novel or play in which a character must contend with some aspect of the past, either personal or societal. Then write an essay in which you show how the character’s relationship to the past contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.... Do not merely summarize the plot.

2008

In a literary work, a minor character, often known as a foil, possesses traits that emphasize, by contrast or comparison, the distinctive characteristics and qualities of the main character. For example, the ideas of behavior of the minor character might be used to highlight the weaknesses or strengths of the main character.

Choose a novel or play in which a minor character serves as a foil to a main character. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the relation between the minor character and the major character illuminates the meaning of a work.

2009

A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning.

Select a novel or play and, focusing on one symbol, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about the characters or themes of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2010

Palestinian American literary theorist and cultural critic Edward Said has written that “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unbeatable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.” Yet Said has also said that exile can become “a potent, even enriching” experience.

Select a novel, play, or epic in which a character experiences such a rift and becomes cut off from “home,” whether that home is the character’s birthplace, family, homeland, or other special place. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the character’s experience with exile is both alienating and enriching, and how this experience illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. You may choose a work from the list below or one of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2011

In a novel by William Styron, a father tells his son that life “is a search for justice.”

Choose a character from a novel or play who responds in some significant way to justice or injustice. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the character’s understanding of justice, the degree to which the character’s search for justice is successful, and the significance of this search for the work as a whole.

Advanced Placement English Literature & Composition

THE 'TRIPLE EIGHT'

ATTACKING THE AP EXAM ESSAY QUESTIONS

Questions 1 & 2

1. Find & mark verbs in the imperative and all conjunctions.
2. Identify all parts of the task.
3. Read the passage attentively and mark it up.
4. Watch for patterns of organization, repetition, echoing, or precedence.
5. Identify speaker, the audience, the setting, and the occasion.
6. Mark shifts in point of view, tone, or the like; mark any significant punctuation/pointing.
7. In poetry, note if a rhyme scheme or the arrangement on the page helps reveal organization.
8. Identify the main purpose & tone.

Question 3

1. Cover list of suggested works.
2. Ignore any opening quotations or other material that comes before the first imperative verb in the prompt.
3. Find and mark all verbs in the imperative.
4. Identify all parts of the task, including any that might be implied rather than explicit. Pay careful attention to any numbers in the prompt.
5. Go back and read the opening of the prompt.
6. Decide on a work to use
7. Decide on an appropriate "meaning of the work as a whole."
8. *[Optional]* Uncover and read the suggested titles to see if there is a better choice.



ALL Questions

1. Write down a plan.
Do *not* let the prompt dictate your organization.
2. Leave a space for an introduction.
3. Remember your audience.
4. Write legibly in ink.
5. Refer often to the text but avoid direct quotations of more than four words
6. Avoid plot summary and paraphrase.
7. Follow all detail from the text with your commentary; use the ratio of two pieces of your commentary to every one of detail from the text.
8. Avoid 'name calling,' the identification of literary elements without explaining why the writer is using them.

A D V A N C E D P L A C E M E N T E N G L I S H

Advanced Placement English Test Terms

Related Terms

The following words and phrases have appeared in recent AP literature exam essay topics. While not a comprehensive list of every word or phrase you might encounter, it can help you understand what you are being asked to do for a topic.

Style: Stylistic devices
Rhetorical devices
Stylistic/rhetorical techniques

Tone: Attitude
Speaker's attitude

Diction: Word choice
Language
Figurative language
Figures of speech

Detail: Imagery
Sensory language
Facts

Point of view: Focus
Narrative focus

Organization: Structure
Narrative techniques
Pattern

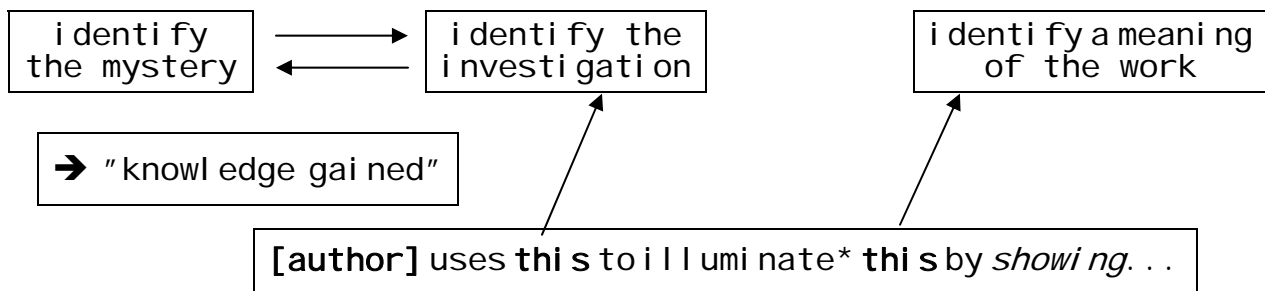
Syntax: Sentence structure
Phrasing

Devices: Figures of speech
Syntax
Diction-

AP Q3 Sample Essay-Question Analysis

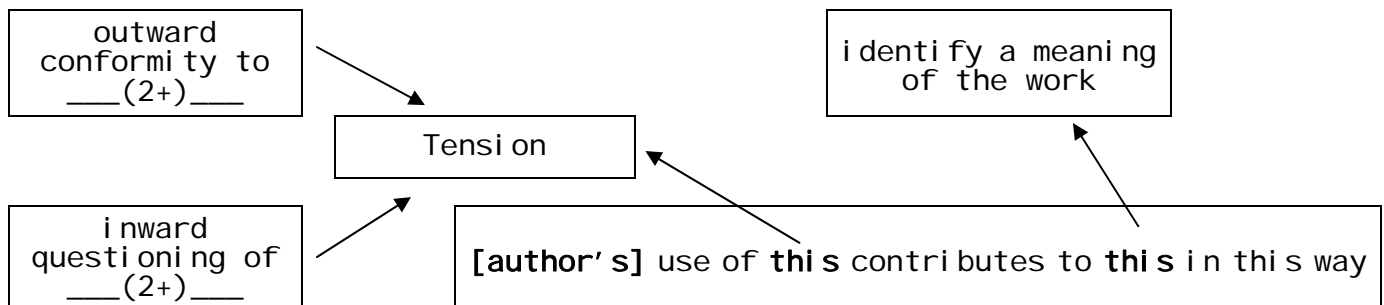
2000

~~Many works of literature not readily identified with the mystery or detective story genre nonetheless involve the investigation of a mystery. In these works, the solution to the mystery may be less important than the knowledge gained in the process of its investigation.~~ Choose a novel or play in which one or more of the characters confront a mystery. Then write an essay in which you identify the mystery and explain how the investigation illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.



2005

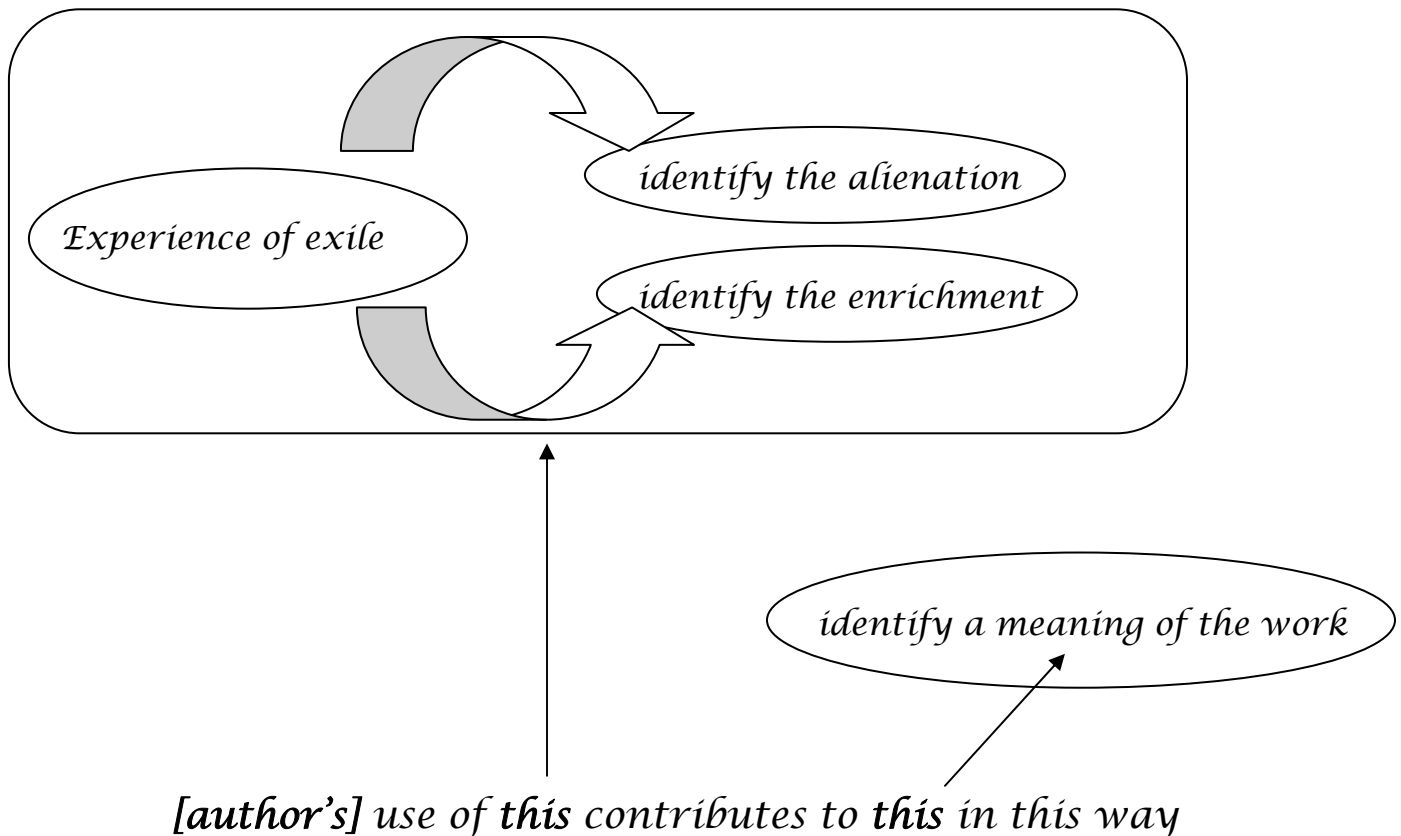
~~In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), protagonist Edna Pontellier is said to possess "that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions."~~ In a novel or play that you have studied, identify a character who conforms outwardly while questioning inwardly. Then write an essay in which you analyze how this tension between outward conformity and inward questioning contributes to the meaning of the work. Avoid mere plot summary.



2010

~~Palestinian-American literary theorist and cultural critic Edward Said has written that “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unbeatable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.” Yet Said has also said that exile can become “a potent, even enriching” experience.~~

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Planning: A Doll's House

THE PROMPT:

A recurring theme in literature is “the classic war between a passion and a responsibility.” For instance, a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotion or drive may conflict with moral duty.

Choose a literary work in which a character confronts the demands of a private passion that conflicts with his or her responsibilities. In a well-written essay show clearly the nature of the conflict, its effects upon the character, and its significance to the work.

You may select a character from one of the following works or from another work of comparable quality.

1

2

3

A PLAN:

THE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT

identify:

the private passion:



the responsibilities:



ITS EFFECTS ON THE CHARACTER

ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE WORK

SOUTH PASADENA HIGH SCHOOL
AP ENGLISH [NICHOLSON]
SUMMER READING: DRAMA

Exam
Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

This essay counts one-third of the total essay section.
(Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Many plays and novels use contrasting places (for example, two countries, two cities or towns, two houses, or the land and the sea) to represent opposed forces or ideas that are central to the meaning of the work.

Choose a novel or a play that contrasts two such places. Write an essay explaining how the places differ, what each place represents, and how their contrast contributes to the meaning of the work.

You may base your essay on a work from the list below, or you may choose another work of recognized literary merit.

<i>A Passage to India</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>
<i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i>	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>
<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	<i>The Color Purple</i>
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	<i>Mansfield Park</i>
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	<i>Huckleberry Finn</i>
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>
<i>Heart of Darkness</i>	<i>The Sun Also Rises</i>
<i>Cry, the Beloved Country</i>	<i>A Farewell to Arms</i>
<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	<i>The Awakening</i>
<i>The Woman Warrior</i>	<i>Jude the Obscure</i>
<i>Anna Karenina</i>	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>
<i>Joseph Andrews</i>	<i>The Dollmaker</i>
<i>Candide</i>	<i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>
<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	<i>Invisible Man</i>
+ <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>	<i>Slaughterhouse Five</i>

Question 3, 1991 Rubric

(*A Streetcar Named Desire*)

9-point scale

Students should be rewarded for what they do well in response to the question. An extremely well-written response may be scored a point higher than it would be scored on the basis of content alone. A poorly written response may be scored a point lower. A very poorly written response will be a lower-half paper.

Possible Scores:

- 9-8 The writers of superior responses choose an appropriate work and give an accurate analysis of the contrast between the “two places.” They identify clearly and discuss effectively the “opposed forces or ideas and identify an appropriate “meaning of the work.” These responses are clear about “how the places differ” and demonstrate how the contrast “contributes” to the work’s meaning. Superior responses are specific in their references to the work, well-organized, and well-written.
- 7 This score is useful for responses which answer the question well but are somewhat thinner in detail or argument than the best essays
- 6-5 These scores are useful for papers which choose an appropriate work and discuss the “opposed forces or ideas” but do one of the following:
- a) discuss a meaning of the work but are unclear about its derivation from the opposition
 - b) discuss the opposition in general terms or by indirection
- Six is probably also the top score for papers which choose a work not wholly appropriate but make an intelligent and reasonable case for it without real distortion.
- 4-3 These lower-half scores include essays which do one of the following
- a) fail to relate the settings to “opposed forces or ideas”
 - b) fail to include any discussion, even by indirection, of the contribution of the opposition of “forces or ideas” to the meaning of the work
 - c) devote an undue proportion of their efforts to description or analysis of the settings
 - d) distort the work to force it to the question
 - e) choose an inappropriate work
- Responses which contain excessive plot summary or engage in vague discussions of conflict or opposition with little reference to the text probably receive no more than 3 and may receive less.
- 2 This score is useful for papers which compound the weaknesses in 4-3 scores or which show serious faults in writing
- 1 This score is used for any on-topic response which has almost no redeeming qualities

A Generalized A.P. Essay Rubric

EXCEPTIONAL--8-9

Complex, original, sophisticated, and varied, with no errors in usage.
Varied sentence construction, with controlled use of subordinate elements.
Lucid and enjoyable to read; smooth flow of ideas.
Logical, coherent structure which facilitates flow of ideas or structure of argument.
Smooth transitions.
Abundant specific support which relates directly to the stated thesis or argument.
Nearly flawless. Errors, if any, are minor.

ADMIRABLE--6-7

Varied, with many complex ideas; few, if any, errors in usage; occasional imprecise word choice.
Uses a variety of sentence forms. Clear prose, with few, if any, tense or agreement errors or awkward constructions.
Structure appropriate for purpose, although not particularly note-worthy
Transitions present between elements.
Primarily specific support with some general statements. Bulk of support is related to thesis.
A few minor errors: misplaced commas or apostrophes, incorrect capitalization, etc.

ADEQUATE--4-5

Many simple words with some complex ideas, imprecise or incorrect word choice, some errors in usage.
Primarily simple and short compound sentence structure. Several awkward or unclear constructions, tense/agreement errors.
Follows formulaic structure which may not fit intentions or purpose of piece.
Transitions, if any, are weak or illogical.
Specific support, if any, is unexplained or illogical. Mostly general statements which are not tied to the thesis or argument.

NOT ACCEPTABLE--2-3

Multiple minor errors or errors of greater magnitude, including comma splices.
Primarily simple words; vague, incorrect word choice; use of cliché.
Almost exclusively simple sentences; convoluted, unclear, repetitious.
Multiple tense and agreement errors.
No attempt made at a logical structure. Transitions, if present, are weak or unclear.
Generalizations, repetitive words and phrases, same idea or example frequently restated.
Major errors: missing or incorrect punctuation, sentence fragments, comma splices, etc.

The “Rubric of all Rubrics”

- 9-8 Superior papers** specific in their references, cogent in their definitions, and free of plot summary that is not relevant to the question. These essays need not be without flaws, but they demonstrate the writer's ability to discuss a literary work with **insight and understanding** and to control a wide range of the elements of **effective composition**. At all times they stay focused on the prompt, providing **specific support**--mostly through direct quotations--and connecting scholarly commentary to the overall meaning.
- 7-6** These papers are less thorough, less perceptive or less specific than 9-8 papers. They are **well-written but with less maturity and control**. While they demonstrate the writer's ability to analyze a literary work, they reveal a more limited understanding and less stylistic maturity than do the papers in the 9-8 range.
- 5** Safe and “plastic,” **superficiality** characterizes these essays. Discussion of meaning may be **formulaic**, mechanical, or inadequately related to the chosen details. Typically, these essays reveal simplistic thinking and/or immature writing. They usually demonstrate inconsistent control over the elements of composition and are not as well conceived, organized, or developed as the upper-half papers. However, the writing is sufficient to convey the writer's ideas, stays mostly focused on the prompt, and contains at least some **effort to produce analysis**, direct or indirect.
- 4-3** Discussion is likely to be unpersuasive, perfunctory, **underdeveloped** or **misguided**. The meaning they deduce may be inaccurate or insubstantial and not clearly related to the question. Part of the question may be omitted altogether. The writing may convey the writer's ideas, but it reveals **weak control** over such elements as diction, organization, syntax or grammar. Typically, these essays contain significant **misinterpretations** of the question or the work they discuss; they may also contain little, if any, supporting evidence, and practice **paraphrase and plot summary at the expense of analysis**.
- 2-1** These essays compound the weakness of essays in the 4-3 range and are frequently unacceptably **brief**. They are **poorly written on several counts**, including many **distracting errors in grammar and mechanics**. Although the writer may have made some effort to answer the question, the views presented have little clarity or coherence.
- 0** A response with no more than a reference to the task.
- A blank paper or completely off-topic response.

Nine-Point Essay scores converted to grades

Score on the 9-point ETS scale for marking essays are fixed by the scoring guide, and teacher discretion does not enter into the rating. Converting those points into grades for a high school AP English class, however, does allow for some variation.

		Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4
Highly rigorous								
9	A	100%	A	100%	A	100%	A	100%
8	A	98%	A	97%	A	96%	A	95%
7	A	90%	B	88%	B	87%	B	85%
6	B	85%	B	82%	B	78%	C	75%
5	B-	80%	C+	77%	C	74%	C-	70%
4	C	75%	C-	70%	C	65%	C-	60%
3	D+	60%	D	55%	D-	50%	F	40%
2	F	40%	F	35%	F	35%	F	30%
1	F	25%	F	20%	F	15%	F	10%
Rigorous								
9	A	100%	A	100%	A	100%	A	100%
8	A	99%	A	98%	A	97%	A	96%
7	A	98%	A	97%	A-	96%	A-	95%
6	A-	90%	B+	88%	B	86%	B	85%
5	B	85%	B-	83%	C+	82%	B-	80%
4	B-	80%	C+	77%	C	74%	C-	70%
3	C	75%	C-	70%	D+	68%	D-	65%
2	D	65%	D-	60%	F+	50%	F	40%
1	F	35%	F	25%	F	15%	F	10%