

## AP Language and Composition Essay Hints

### Scoring

- The Multiple Choice section counts for 45% and the essay section counts for 55%.
- Each essay is read by a different trainer.
- Each essay is scored as a 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, or 0
- There are 27 points possible divided into 55% of the total possible score. The formula would look something like this.
  - $(\text{pts. X } 3.055) + (\text{pts. X } 3.055) + (\text{pts. X } 3.055) = \text{Essay Raw Score}$   
                Essay 1                  Essay 2                  Essay 3
- 150 is the total composite score for the AP Language and Composition test. 55% of this is essay section; that equals 82.5 points. 45% of this is the multiple choice section, which equals 67.5 points. Each essay is graded on a 9 point scale; therefore, each point is worth 3.055. Divide the number of multiple choice questions by 67.5. For example, if there were 55 questions, each point of the raw score would be multiplied by 1.227. Add together the raw scores of the two sections and you will have a composite score. Based on the data of the past, this is how the total composite scores will translate into levels.
  - 150-100 =Level 5
  - 99-86= Level 4
  - 85-67=Level 3
- Successful writers do the following:
  - Use a wide range vocabulary appropriately and effectively
  - Use a variety of sentence structures
  - Use a logical organization enhanced by specific techniques to increase coherence such as judicious repetition, strong transitions, and appropriate emphasis
  - Use a balance of generalization and specific illustrative detail
  - Use an effective rhetoric, controlling tone, establishing and maintaining a voice, and achieving appropriate emphasis through diction and sentence structure
- Always consider the rhetorical triangle of each piece of writing. This is simply the speaker/writer, the audience, and the subject. You might want to complete this for each piece as a form of pre-writing. Ex. Speaker-Helen Keller. Audience-those at Mt. Airy listening to the speech. Subject-Helen's feelings about learning how to speak. Also consider the purpose and context of the writing.
- Things to bring to the exam and do on the day of the exam
  - Don't cram the night before. Start preparing daily NOW (AP test prep book, read the newspaper (editorials, political cartoons, articles, etc.)
  - Several pencils
  - Several black pens (black ink is easier on the eyes than blue). You must write in pen for the essay. Do not choose a pen that will bleed through.
  - No highlighters
  - A watch (no beeps or alarms)
  - Something to drink (water helps the brain think)
  - A quiet snack (peppermints help stimulate the brain) for the break between the multiple choice and essay (fruit, energy bar, juice, water).
  - Tissues
  - Allow plenty of time to get to the test site
  - Wear comfortable clothing and dress in layers to adjust to the temperature
  - Get plenty of sleep the night before
  - Rub your ears when you become brain dead. It stimulates blood to your brain.
  - Don't freak out. Take a deep breath. Do a quick prayer/mediation if you find yourself having anxiety (Mrs. Spriggs will be sending up oodles of prayers for you while you're taking the test ☺).
  - Eat a breakfast that will sustain you (protein, whole grains, fruit, NOT high sugar cereals, poptarts, or soda)
  - Be on Time! Latecomers are not permitted.
- Introduction to the Essays
  - You will be given 15 minutes to read all three essay sections. However, you will not be allowed to open and write in the actual test booklet until the end of the 15 minute period. You will have a total of two hours to write the essays. Each essay carries the same weight, so do not spend an inappropriate amount of time on any one essay.
  - You do not need to answer the essays in the order they appear. You may choose to begin with the easiest essay. Be sure to number your essay response on the top of the page so that you receive credit!!!

- Keep your quotes short. A direct quote of more than one or two lines of text is too much. You need not always write out the actual quotations; sometimes you can simply make a reference to a particular section by giving line numbers. The synthesis essay will require you to incorporate sources.
- Discuss and Explain. Do not Retell, List, or Summarize.
- As a rule, five paragraphs (introduction, three body paragraphs, and a good conclusion) make an adequate essay. However, the cookie-cutter 5 paragraph structure may not be the best for developing your ideas. Choose the structure that supports your position.
- You may use your observations, readings, and experiences for the synthesis and argumentative pieces.
- If you make a mistake, cross it out neatly.
- **The Analysis Essay**
  - You will be presented with a prose passage that can be drawn from various genres and time periods. Although the specific tasks asked vary from year to year, they almost always involve the analysis of language, including rhetorical strategies and stylistic elements.
  - The prompt will most likely be a two-level system. What did the author do (main idea, central attitude, purpose, etc.) and how did the author do it?
  - It is very unlikely that you will be familiar with the passage. However, if you are, do not feel the need to cram in everything you know about the piece into your essay. At the same time, do not feel overwhelmed if you have never seen the passage before. By the time of the exam, you will have been thoroughly prepared to analyze any passage that you are presented with.
    - Don't be thrown by the complexity of the passage. You choose the references you want to incorporate into your essay. Even if you don't understand everything, you can write an intelligent essay as long as you address the prompt and refer to the parts of the passage you understand.
  - The level of your writing should be a direct reflection of your critical thinking. AP is looking for connections between analysis and the passage. Identify, connect, and analyze the items. Don't just list them.
  - Possible prompts
    - Analyze an author's view on a specific subject
    - Analyze rhetorical devices used by an author to achieve his or her purpose
    - Analyze stylistic elements in a passage and their effects
    - Analyze the author's tone and how the author conveys the tone
    - Compare/and or contrast two passages with regard to style, purpose, or tone
    - Analyze the techniques the author used to express an attitude of \_\_\_\_\_
    - Analyze the rhetorical strategies the author employs to convey an attitude of \_\_\_\_\_
    - Analyze the attitude of the speaker
    - Analyze the attitudes of the author using tone and style
    - Analyze the distinctive style of each passage and reveal the purposes of the author
    - Analyze the author's purpose and how he or she achieves it
    - Analyze some of the ways an author recreates a real or imagined experience
    - Discuss the intended and/or probable effect of a passage
- The AP readers use a rubric to grade your essay. They are trained to reward you for things you do well, and they are NOT looking to punish you. Become familiar with the sample rubric provided. The readers understand that this is a draft of your writing.
- **Planning your Essay Time**
  - In the margin, not what time you should be finished with the essay. For example, the test starts at 1:00. You write 1:40 in the margin.
  - 1-3 minutes reading and working the prompt
  - 5 minutes reading and making marginal notes about the passage. Try to isolate two references that strike you. This may give you your opening and closing.
  - 10 minutes preparing to write
    - Underlining, circling
    - Use a shorthand system to mark repeated themes, author's purpose, supporting details, etc.
    - Marginal Mapping
    - Charts
  - 20 minutes writing your essay
  - 3 minutes proofreading
- **Strategies**

- Read the prompt and highlight, circle, or underline the essential terms and elements in the prompt. It should take 1-3 minutes.
- When the prompt reads *such as*, you are not required to use only those ideas presented; you are free to use your own selections of techniques, strategies, and devices. The prompt requires more than one element. You must use more than one.
- The incidental data given in the prompt can help your analysis. Pay attention to titles, footnotes, the author, the date of publication, etc.
- After you have quickly analyzed the prompt, read the passage. Read quickly the first time to get the gist of the passage. Reread, using highlighting and marginal notes analyzing the text. Concentrate on the parts of the passage that apply to what you highlighted in the prompt.

#### ➤ Opening Paragraph

- Your opening paragraph is the one that catches the eye of the reader and sets the expectation and tone of your essay. A suggested approach is to relate a direct reference from the passage to the topic. Make certain that the topic is very clear to the reader. Always identify both the text and the author in the first paragraph.
- A lengthy opening is unnecessary
- Create a strong thesis statement that addresses the prompt with three main areas of focus/rhetorical devices and literary tools used.
- Self-Check
  - Have you included the author and title?
  - Have you addressed the prompt/task?
  - Have you specifically mentioned the elements and techniques you will refer to in your essay?
  - Example Prompt and Opening Paragraph
    - Prompt: The following paragraphs are from the opening of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. After carefully reading the excerpt, write a well-organized essay in which you characterize Capote's view of Holcomb, Kansas and analyze how Capote conveys this view. Your analysis may consider such stylistic elements as diction, imagery, syntax, structure, tone, and selection of detail.
    - Opening Paragraph A: In the opening of *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote presents a picture of the town of Holcomb, Kansas. Through structure, selection of detail, and a detached tone, he makes clear that he views Holcomb as dull and ordinary.
    - Opening Paragraph B: "Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Sante Fe tracks, drama in the shape of exceptional happenings, has never stopped here." This is the town of Holcomb, Kansas. Using a reportorial tone, specific structure, and selection of detail, Capote introduces the reader to this unremarkable town in the opening of *In Cold Blood*.
    - Opening Paragraph C: *In Cold Blood* is a very appropriate title because Capotes presents a cold and unemotional view of Holcomb, Kansas. His tone, structure, and selection of detail create a distant and detached picture of this desolate farm community.

#### ➤ Body Paragraphs

- Use your three ideas listed in your thesis to create your topic sentences for each paragraph. The 1<sup>st</sup> idea in your thesis should be the 1<sup>st</sup> idea in your essay and so forth. Each paragraph should have a specific focus and topic sentence!
  - This paragraph develops the idea of tone:
    - Throughout the passage, Capote maintains a tone that resembles a detached reporter who is an observer of a scene. Although the impact of the passage is seeing Holcomb in a less than positive light, the author rarely uses judgmental terminology or statements. In describing the town, he uses words such as "float," "haphazard," "unnamed," "unshaded," and "unpaved." Individuals are painted with an objective brush showing them in "denim," "Stetsons," and "cowboy boots." Capote maintains his panning camera angle when he writes of the buildings and the surrounding farm land. This matter-of-fact approach is slightly altered when he begins to portray the townspeople as a whole when he uses words such as "prosperous people," "comfortable interiors," and "have done well." His objective tone, interestingly enough, does exactly what he says the folks of Holcomb do. He "camouflages" his attitude toward the reality of the place and setting.
- Use specific references and details from the passage. Don't always paraphrase the original. Refer directly to it and use quotations marks around the words/phrases used in the exact passage.

- Use connective tissue in your essay to establish adherence to the question.
  - Try using echo words (synonyms) to build cohesion of ideas without redundant repetition (town/village; bland/ordinary/undistinguished)
  - Use transitions between paragraphs
    - Numerical: first, second, third, primarily, secondly
    - Sequential: initially, furthermore, ultimately, in conclusion, to conclude
    - Additional: furthermore, moreover, similarly, additionally
    - Illustrative: for example, for instance, to illustrate
    - Contrast/comparative: nevertheless, conversely, instead, however, none the less, on the contrary
    - Cause and effect: therefore, consequently, as a result, accordingly
    - Affirmation: of course, obviously, indeed
- **Concluding Paragraphs**
  - Spend more time developing solid body paragraphs rather than elaborate conclusions.
  - In your BRIEF conclusion, try to link your ideas to particularly effective line or image from the passage.
  - A conclusion does not have to be a paragraph; it can be your final remark or observation in a sentence or two
  - You may ask a question to conclude
    - If Capote chooses to illuminate this contrast, does it indicate more to come?
- **Argumentative Essay**
  - The argumentative essay will present you with an excerpt or a statement. Once you understand what the passage is saying, you have to ask yourself: Do you think in the same way as the author (agree)? Do I think the writer is completely wrong (disagree)? Do I think some of it is correct and some incorrect (qualify)?
    - You might be given a controversial quotation and asked to defend, challenge, or qualify what has been stated
    - You might be presented with an argument and asked to analyze it. In this case, you are expected to look at the logic of the argument, but not necessarily offer your opinion
    - You may be presented with two different views on an idea or belief, and then asked to explain each side of the argument and develop your opinion
    - The test is beginning to involve. Some prompts have asked students to consider two viewpoints before beginning their response.
    - Be aware of the Prompt's Purpose. If it does not ask for your opinion or position do not give it but instead analyze the argument presented.
  - You will use your observations, readings, and experiences to support your position. Your support should be rational and logical, not emotional. It should be objective rather than biased.
  - The prompt might ask you indicate which idea in a given set is more valid or explore the validity of an assertion
  - The prompt will ask you to defend (agree with), challenge (disagree with) or qualify (agree with some and disagree with other parts of the text) the:
    - Author's position
    - Statement's main idea
    - The narrative's main point
  - You need to do three things for this essay
    - Understand the nature of the position taken in the prompt
    - Take a specific stand-argue, qualify, or disagree-with the assertion in the prompt
    - Clearly and logically support your claim
  - You may use any of the following to support your argument
    - Facts/statistics
    - Details
    - Quotations
    - Recognition of the opposite
    - Examples
    - Anecdotes
    - Compare and contrast
    - Cause and effect
    - Appeal to authority
  - Your essay is graded for process and mastery and manipulation of language, not for how close you come to the viewpoint of your reader

- Pre-writing. See notes above. List ideas for defense (agree), challenge (disagree), and qualify (agree with some parts and disagree with others).
- Introduction
  - Refer specifically to the prompt (speaker and occasion, topic) and clearly state your position on the given issue.
  - The classical formula for an argument is
    - Present the issue/situation/problem
    - State your assertion/claim/thesis
    - Support your claim
    - Acknowledge and respond to real or possible opposing views
    - Make your final comment or summary of the evidence
  - This essay also works well with the cause/effect format opening.
    - Ask Question about specific focus,
    - Use *Indeed*, transition and state the opposite of your position.
    - Use *However*, and list two to three big ideas supporting your stance.
    - Example:
      - Does television have the power for limitless capabilities for good-and for evil? Indeed, television allows individuals to experience vast worlds unbeknownst to the common man. However, television has the capacity to negatively impact the mental, social, and physical well-being of those who become addicted to it.
- Body Paragraphs
  - Traditional Argumentative Essays follow this basic guideline:
    - State the purpose/claim (strong thesis with specific stance)
    - Anticipate objections from the reader (1<sup>st</sup> body paragraph)
    - Counter objections by supporting the claim with solid evidence (2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> body paragraphs)
    - Conclusion restating stance that was derived from evidence
  - Four Elements of a Logical Argument
    - Claim-The specific proposition of a writer is the claim. A claim may be made directly or indirectly.
    - Objections-Knowing the main points of the opponent helps a writer answer objections effectively.
    - Evidence-A writer supports a claim with facts, interprets the facts, and explains- giving statistics, reasons, examples, or other evidence)
    - Conclusion-The end of an argument is often a restatement of the claim. It may be a summary of the main points or a logical generalization. It may attempt to motivate the reader to act.
  - You may briefly set-up your essay with the cause/effect opening format and use the first paragraph to address and anticipate objections to your stance. Use your last two paragraphs to build support for your position. Always leave your most powerful examples for the last body paragraph. Build up to your "power points"; don't begin with them.
    - Block Organization:
      - Main points of opposing side appear in one chunk (1<sup>st</sup> body paragraph) before proponent's argument. This conveys a sense of fairness but also postpones disagreement. In the body paragraphs following the 1<sup>st</sup>, the writer counters the opponent's points and builds his or her position with specific evidence.
    - Alternating Method:
      - This organization pairs one of the opposing points with one of the proponent's, arguing back and forth, emphasizing the answer to each point. A possible disadvantage is that it introduces disagreement early into the essay, and it requires more transitions. Always begin with a con point and answer with a pro. Remember con is simply whatever stance is against you, and pro represents your stance. Con and Pro do not mean "Good" and "Bad."
      - Any unanswered points pose serious flaws for your argument. If you cannot answer a point adequately and decide to reverse your opinion within your paper, it is fine to do so. It shows you have an open, logical mind.
      - Main points are arranged in least-to most-important so that the argument gradually builds. The best point is placed last, where it receives the most emphasis.

- Common Ground prepares the reader for a fair and reasonable argument. This should be established within the 1<sup>st</sup> body paragraph. If you can find any similar or “common ground” within the topic, state this to your reader.
- Agreeing before disagreeing is a great way to draw your reader in. Use phrases such as
  - It is true...but
  - Proponents realize/agree...yet they believe...
  - Supporters recognize...; still they do not acknowledge
  - Indeed....however,....
  - Certainly....despite these claims
  - Granted...in contrast...
- Have an appropriate and respectful tone when first introducing the opponent’s possible objections. This is a “fair fight/discussion” in which you listen and hear what your opponent says before you begin. You must show that you heard them by addressing their specific concerns with specific evidence and details.
- Refuting Opposing Points
  - To refute a point you show that it is irrelevant or only partly true or completely false.
  - In answering objections, avoid any hint of disrespect for the reader’s view. This will cause you to lose “points” in your reader’s mind.
  - To be convincing, a writer needs adequate evidence. The opinion of just one source is inadequate, you need multiple sources. Opinion must be substantiated by facts, reasons, and examples.
  - Use quality evidence and avoid weak evidence.
- However you set up your essay, support your ideas with specific examples
- Your argument can be
  - Ethical-appeal to the reader’s good sense, good will, and the desire to do the “right thing”
  - Emotional-an appeal to the reader’s fear, patriotism, and so forth. This particular essay should have its central focus on logical and rational support and be free of bias. Use caution with ethical and emotional appeals for this reason.
  - Be aware of logical fallacies and **AVOID** them in your writing
    - Non sequitur argument (“Does not follow”). Diane graduated from Harvard. She’ll make a great lawyer.
    - Begging the Question (writer assumes something that is yet to be proven). Taking geometry is a waste of time, and high school students should not be required to take it.
    - Circular Reasoning (restates the premise rather than giving a reason). I like to eat out because I enjoy different foods and restaurants.
    - Straw-man Argument (attributing false or exaggerated characteristics or behaviors to the opponent and attacks him on falsehoods or exaggerations).
    - Ad hominem (attacks the person rather than the argument)
    - Hasty generalization (draws a conclusion on an entire group based on insufficient evidence). Ex. A voluntary national service would solve the United States’ problems.
    - Overgeneralization (stereotyping: writer makes a conclusion about a large number of people based on very limited evidence)
    - Post Hoc argument (cites an unrelated event that occurred earlier as the cause of a current situation). I saw a black cat cross the street five minutes before the accident. Therefore, the black cat is the cause of the accident.
    - Either/or argument: the writer asserts that there are only two possibilities when in reality there are more.

#### Logical-appeal to inductive and deductive reasoning

- Induction-forming a generalization from a set of specific examples. Margo has 17 stuffed bears, 3 stuffed cows, 11 monkeys, 4 camels, and 6 stuffed elephants. Margo loves to collect stuffed animals.
- Deduction-reaching a probable conclusion based on given premises. A premise is a proposition that is proven or taken for granted. All high school seniors at this high school must write a research paper. Sean is a senior at this high school. Therefore, Sean must write a research paper.
- Possible problems: Avoid making broad assumptions with words like ALL, ALWAYS, NEVER, etc.

#### ➤ Conclusion

- Your conclusion is the final nail in the building of an argument. A conclusion should restate the thesis and leave the reader persuaded that the reasoning is valid. If action is advocated, the conclusion should convey a sense of immediacy. The conclusion of an argument should be sound, appropriate, and complete.

- Quickly restate your position and main examples of support. If you can find a powerful way to reconnect all ideas, do so (quote, anecdote, etc.). If a creative conclusion doesn't come to you immediately, sum up your ideas quickly in one to two sentences and move on to your next essay. You may use an anecdote, question, or challenging/powerful image/statement to close your argument.

### ➤ Synthesis Essay

- You will be presented with an introduction to and a description of an issue that has varying viewpoints associated with it. Accompanying this is a selection of sources that address the topic. These sources can be written texts that could include nonfiction, fiction, poetry, drama, visual texts, photos, charts, art work, cartoons, etc. After reading and annotating the sources, the student is required to respond to the given prompt with an essay that incorporates and synthesizes at least THREE of the sources in support of your position on the subject. You will NOT be given "extra points" for incorporating more than three sources. You will NOT pass this essay if you fail to cite sources at any time.
- Use the sources as springboards or buttresses for your argument. Do not let the sources drive your essay.
- The College Board wants to determine how well a student can read critically, understand texts, analyze texts, develop a position on a given topic, support a position on a given topic, support a position with appropriate evidence from outside sources, incorporate outside sources into the texts of the essay, cite sources used in the essay
- Use the sources and your observations, readings, and experiences to support your thesis.
- This essay is a chance to demonstrate your ability to develop a "researched idea" using not only your personal viewpoint, but also the viewpoints of others.
- Don't be alarmed by the length or complexity of the sources. You will choose your position, and you will choose which texts to incorporate. As long as you address the prompt and cite the required number of sources, you will be fine.
- You must be able to analyze the argument each source is making. What claim is the source making about the issue? What data or evidence does the source offer in support of the claim? What are the assumptions or beliefs (explicit or unspoken) that warrant using this evidence or data to support the claim?
- Ask the questions:
  - What are two or three possible positions that I could take on this issue?
  - Which of these positions do I want to take? Why? Keep an open mind, and choose the topic that you will have the best essay and supporting details.
  - Many of the best essays don't have a simple and "easy" thesis but instead take a more critical approach that recognize the complexities of the issue.
  - Imagine arguing the topic with an individual. Argue your position and feel free to say things like, "Source A takes a position similar to mine," or Source C would oppose this position, but here is why I still maintain its validity," etc.
- This essay has two main approaches
  - First: Expository essay in which you develop your thesis and support it with specific examples from appropriate sources. You may use compare/contrast, cause and effect, or analysis
  - Second: Argumentative essay in which you take a position on a particular topic and support the viewpoint with appropriate outside sources, while indicating the weaknesses of other viewpoints.
- **Common Errors**
  - not taking a clear position or wavering between positions
  - Substituting a thesis-oriented expository essay (informing the reader of the different topics/positions) for an argumentative essay
  - Being reluctant to engage in verbal combat because "everybody's entitled to his or her opinion" so there's nothing to argue about
  - Slipping out of focus by discussing imagery in general
  - Trying to argue about photography by using evidence from a literary reading list (for example, *The Scarlet Letter*) and sliding off topic into theme of appearance and reality
  - Lacking clear connections between claims and the data, and the warrants needed to support them
  - Trying to analyze style or rhetorical strategies instead of arguing a point (wrong essay...that would be analysis!!!)
- Carefully read the prompt and all introductory material. Many times the extra information will provide you with time-saving information.
  - With visual texts
    - Identify the subject/s
    - Identify the major components
    - Identify verbal clues such as titles, date, cartoonist, and dialogue

- Notice position and size of details of images
- Identify the primary purpose
- How do the details support the purpose?
- Pre-writing: See Notes in previous section. Clearly mark and decide which position you will take and which sources will support your viewpoint.
- Opening Paragraph: Specifically address the prompt and clearly state your position on the topic (thesis with 3 ideas). You may use anecdotes, personal experiences, observations, startling facts/statistics, etc. to “catch” your reader’s attention.
- Body Paragraphs: Use transitions to connect ideas. Build up to your strongest point with each paragraph. When citing sources, all you need to do is put the source in parenthesis (Source A) or say, “According to Source A.....”
- Use a mixture of direct quotations, summary, and paraphrases when incorporating your sources. Remember that you MUST establish a position and each source you choose MUST support and develop your position.
  - Summary: read a text closely and locate the key words/phrases that enable you to reduce the piece to its essential points
  - Paraphrase: transpose the original material into your own words. It will be close to number of words in the original text.
  - Inference: drawing a conclusion based on specific material
  - Quotations:
    - Direct Quotation/Full citation provided at beginning of sentence: John Broder in his February 21, 2006, New York Times article titled “States Curbing Right to Seize Private Homes,” quotes Scott G. Bullock, “....”
    - Direct Quotation/Citation placed outside the text: In a 60 Minutes interview presented on July 4, 2004, Jim Saleet, a homeowner, stated, “.....” (Source E).
    - Paraphrase of and direct quotation third paragraph citation placed outside of the text: John Echeverria sees a danger arising from doing away with the powers of eminent domain. There is real danger the areas will experience “economic decline” (Source E).
    - Combination of Direct Quotation and Paraphrase citation provided outside of the text (note the use of ellipsis): In 2005, a supreme court decision ruled that “...the government taking of property from private owner...” (Source C).
    - Direct Quotation Citation after Sentence: 68% of survey respondents said that they “favored legislative limits on the government’s ability to take private property away from owners...” (Source G)
    - Direct Quotation with Citation with Sentence: According to a survey conducted by CNN on July 23, 2005, 66% of those responding said “never” to the question, “Should local governments be able to seize homes?”
    - Paraphrase Citation Outside Sentence: In recent polls conducted by both the Washington Times and CNN, over 60% said no when asked if local governments should be able to take over private homes and businesses (Source G).
- Conclusion: Restate main idea but do not simply summarize. Try to powerfully connect ideas or find another source that somehow unites all items discussed.