

AP Language and Composition Prompts (1981 to 2014)

YEAR	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
1981	“The Rattler”- analyze effect on reader – consider organization, point of view, language, detail.	George Bernard Shaw letter – describe writer’s attitude toward mother & her cremation – diction and detail	Thomas Szasz – argue for or against his position on the struggle for definition. Use readings, study, or experience.
1982	A reading on happiness – summarize his reasons for his opinion and explain why you agree or not with his opinion	Analyze the strategies or devices (organization, diction, tone, detail) that make Gov. Stevenson’s Cat Veto argument effective.	Describe a place, conveying feeling through concrete and specific detail.
1983	A quote on change - Select a change for the better that has occurred or that you want to occur; analyze its desirable and undesirable effects	Excerpt from Thomas Carlyle’s <i>Past and Present</i> – define Carlyle’s attitude toward work and analyze how he uses language to convince....	Agree or disagree with the position in the passage on living in an era of language inflation by considering the ethical and social consequences of language inflation.
1984	Explain the nature and importance of two or three means by which you keep track of time and discuss how these means reveal your person. (Hint given about “inner clocks.”)	Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Milton – two very short quotes on freedom – describe the concept of freedom in each; discuss the differences.	A passage on a boxing match between Benny Paret, a Cuban, and Emile Griffith – Analyze how diction, syntax, imagery, and tone produce an effect on the reader.
1985	Contrast stylistic and rhetorical differences between two passages on the Soviet Launch of the first space satellite	Discuss the probable reasons for an anonymous writer’s additions and deletions and the ways in which those revisions change the effect of the paragraph. Two drafts that record the writer’s thoughts on how the experience of war affected his attitude toward language.	Defend a position or one or more issues raised in the passage about the state of television in the United States.
1986	Explain how two passages by N. Scott Momaday and Dee Brown, which describe similar landscapes, reveal the differences in the authors’ purposes. Consider diction, syntax, imagery, and tone.	Choose one or more pairs of words from a list and discuss and elaborate on the distinctions between the paired words. Consider how, when, why, and by whom each word might be used.	Evaluate the truth of the assertion in the quotation that human nature wants patterns, standards, and structures of behavior.
1987	Agree or disagree with E. M. Forster’s view that personal relations are more important than causes or patriotism.	Analyze how Zora Neale Hurston enriches our sense of her childhood world through her diction and manipulation of point of view.	Describe some major features of the language used in one specific group – occupational, ethnic, social, or age, etc. Indicate the purpose these features serve or what influences they reflect.
1988	Evaluate Alexis De Tocqueville’s assertions about democracy and aristocracy and his assertion that democracy “throws [man] back forever upon himself alone.”	Analyze Frederick Douglass’ language, especially the figures of speech and syntax, to convey his states of mind upon escaping slavery and arriving in New York in 1838.	Pretend to contribute to a magazine or newspaper; write an article describing a place you know well that might be of interest to readers. Define the significance, use descriptive detail to make attitude clear.

1989	Argue for or against the validity of the implied criticism of a church bulletin [text given] reprinted without other comment in a magazine under the heading “The Religious Life.”	Describe the rhetorical purpose of Martin Luther King’s <i>Why We Can’t Wait</i> . Analyze its stylistic, narrative, and persuasive devices.	Missing
1990	From an autobiography of a professional woman pilot in Africa, analyze how the author’s juxtaposition of ideas, choice of details, and other aspects of style reveal her personality.	Analyze stylistic and rhetorical differences between two nineteenth century descriptions of the Galapagos Islands	Vividly and concretely describe one person seen at two different times or in two different situations so readers understand the difference in your attitude, thus proving perceptions of people differ according to people’s attitudes and circumstances
1991	Analyze the language and rhetorical devices Igor Stravinsky uses to convey his point of view about orchestra conductors.	Analyze how Richard Rodriguez’s presentation of the events in the passage suggests his attitude toward his family and himself. Consider narrative structure, detail, manipulation of language, and tone.	Write a persuasive essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies the assertion that “For in much wisdom is much grief, and increase of knowledge is increase of sorrow” (Ecclesiastes).
1992	Analyze Queen Elizabeth I’s diction, imagery, and sentence structure to achieve her purpose in her speech to her troops at Tilbury, 1588.	Using your observation, experience, or reading, defend, challenge, or qualify Joseph Addison’s assertion that men use ridicule to “laugh men out of virtue and good sense.”	Considering the choice of the word “cripple” and other rhetorical features, such as tone, word choice, and rhetorical structure, analyze how Nancy Mairs, who has multiple sclerosis, presents herself.
1993	Compare the rhetorical strategies – such as arguments, assumptions, attitudes, diction – used by characters from Jane Austen (1813) and Charles Dickens (1865). Comment on both intended and probable effects of the proposals on the women being addressed	Defend, challenge, or qualify H. L. Mencken’s views about the artist’s relation to society. Refer to particular writers, composers, or other artists.	Read the paragraph for E. M. Forster’s 1936 essay “My Wood.” Define Forster’s attitude toward the experience of owning property and analyze that attitude; consider Forster’s word choice, manipulation of sentences, and use of Biblical Allusions
1994	From an excerpt of Sir George Savile’s essay about King Charles II (1630 – 1685), define the attitude Savile would like us to adopt about Charles II and analyze the rhetorical strategies employed to promote that attitude.	Defend, challenge, or qualify Barbara Tuchman’s claim that “wooden-headedness plays a remarkably large role . . . in human affairs.” Use evidence and/or your observations. (From <i>The March of Folly</i>)	Characterize and analyze Joan Didion’s view of the Santa Ana winds. Consider her stylistic elements, such as diction, imagery, syntax, structure, tone, and selection of detail.
1995	In 1860, John Ruskin argued for giving precedence to the soldier rather than to the merchant or manufacturer. Evaluate his argument. (Excerpt included)	Analyze the rhetorical techniques Ellen Goodman uses to convey her attitude toward Phil, the subject of her piece, “The Company Man.”	After reading his paragraph, defend, challenge, or qualify James Baldwin’s ideas about the importance of language as a “key to identity” and social acceptance. Use your observation, experience, or readings.
1996	Read the passage from Lady Mary Wortley Montague’s letter to her daughter. Analyze how Lady Mary (1689 – 1762) uses rhetorical strategies and stylistic devices to convey her views about the role knowledge played in the lives of women of her time.	Read the passage from <i>A Summer Life</i> and analyze some of the ways in which Gary Soto recreates the experience of his guilty six-year old self. Consider such devices as contrast, reputation, pacing, diction, and imagery.	Using your own knowledge and experience, defend, challenge, or qualify Lewis Lapham’s view of “the American faith in money” from <i>Money and Class in America</i> . (25 line excerpt included.)

1997	Read the passage from Meena Alexander's <i>Fault Lines</i> and analyze how Alexander uses language to explore and represent her fractured identity.	Read the passage from the 1845 <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i> , noting such elements as syntax, figurative language, and selection of detail. Write an essay in which you identify stylistic elements that distinguish third paragraph from the rest of the passage and discuss how that difference is significant	Using your own critical understanding of contemporary society, agree or disagree with Neil Postman's assertion that Aldous Huxley's vision of society in <i>Brave New World</i> is more relevant today than is George Orwell's in <i>1984</i> .
1998	Paying particular attention to tone, analyze the techniques Charles Lamb uses to decline William Wordsworth's invitation to visit him in the country.	From Henry James's novel <i>The Portrait of a Lady</i> , read the conversation between Madame Merle and Isabel Archer, noting their conflicting views about what constitutes the self. In a persuasive essay, demonstrate which of the two conceptions of the self has greater validity. Use specific evidence from your observation, experience or reading.	After reading the two letters between an executive of the Coca-Cola company and a representative of Grove Press, analyze the rhetorical strategies each writer uses to achieve his purpose and explain which letter offers the more persuasive case.
1999	After reading two passages about Florida's Okefenokee Swamp, analyze how the distinctive style of each reveals the purpose of its writer.	After reading the [3 columns long] opening from Jamaica Kincaid's essay, "On Seeing England for the First Time," analyze the rhetorical strategies Kincaid employs to convey her attitude toward England.	After thinking about the implications of the excerpt from <i>Antigone</i> , explore the validity of the assertion that "The only / Crime is pride." Use examples from your reading, observation, or experience.
2000	Eudora Welty recalls reading and books that influenced her craft as a writer. Analyze how Welty's language conveys intensity and value of reading.	George Orwell uses Gandhi to argue for choosing human imperfection over sainthood. Analyze how Orwell criticizes Gandhi's position & how Orwell develops his own position.	Paraphrase King Lear's comment that wealth covers sin and injustice. Defend, challenge, or qualify his view of the relationship between wealth and justice.
2001	George Eliot's letter to an American woman M. F. Peirce. Analyze the rhetorical strategies Eliot uses to establish her position about the development of a writer.	Analyze how Mary Oliver's style about owls conveys the complexity of her response to nature.	Support, refute, qualify Susan Sontag's claim that photography limits understanding of the world. Use appropriate evidence.
2002	Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address was a short speech in which he contemplated the effects of the Civil War and offered his vision for the future. Analyze the rhetorical strategies Lincoln used to achieve his purpose.	Analyze how Virginia Woolf uses language to convey the lasting significance of moments she recalls from her childhood spent in a seaside village in Cornwall, England.	Support, refute, or qualify Czech writer Milan Kundera's claims as expressed in an excerpt from <i>Testaments Betrayed</i> . Use appropriate evidence.
2003	Defend, challenge, qualify Neal Gabler's assertion that entertainment has the capacity to ruin society.	Analyze the methods of Alfred Green's 1861 speech to persuade his fellow African Americans to join the Union forces.	Compare and contrast how John James Audubon and Annie Dillard each describe a flock of birds in flight and how they convey the birds' effect on the writer as observer.
2004	Analyze how the rhetorical strategies used by Lord Chesterfield in his letter to his son reveal his own values.	Choose a controversial local, national, or global issue with which you are familiar and use appropriate evidence in an essay that carefully considers the opposing positions on this controversy and proposes a solution or compromise.	Analyze how Richard Rodriguez uses contrasts between central Mexico and California to convey and explore his conflicting feelings in an excerpt from <i>Days of Obligation</i> .

2005	Passage from “Training for Statesmanship” by George Kennan. Select his most compelling observation and consider the extent to which that observation holds true.	A mock press release from <i>The Onion</i> . Analyze the strategies used in the article to satirize how products are marketed to consumers.	Peter Singer argues that prosperous people should donate to overseas aid organizations all money not needed for the basic requirements of life. Evaluate the pros and cons of his argument and indicate which position you find more persuasive.
2005 Form B	Lecture delivered in Boston in 1832 by Maria Stewart, African American educator and writer. Analyze the rhetorical strategies Stewart uses to convey her position.	John Barry describes the complex mechanics of the <i>Mississippi River in Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America</i> . Analyze how Barry communicates his fascination with the river to his readers.	Passage from <i>The Medusa and the Snail</i> by Lewis Thomas. Drawing on your own reading and experience, write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Thomas’s claims.
2006	Jennifer Price’s essay examines the popularity of the pink plastic flamingo in the 1950s. Analyze how Price crafts the text to reveal her view of U. S. culture.	William Hazlitt’s “On the Want of Money.” Analyze the rhetorical strategies he uses to develop his position about money.	From talk radio to television, to popular magazines to Web blogs ordinary citizens, political figures, and entertainers express their opinions on a wide range of topics. Take a position on the value of such public statements of opinion.
2006 Form B	In a well-written essay that draws upon your reading, experience, or observations for support, take a position on the issue of compulsory voting.	Passage from George Bernard Shaw’s <i>Saint Joan</i> . Analyze the rhetorical strategies the Inquisitor uses to argue his case against Joan.	Passage by philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies one of Schopenhauer’s claims.
2007	First Synthesis – based on six sources, all about advertising. Develop a position on the effects of advertising and synthesize at least three of the sources for support.	In <i>Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World</i> , Scott Russell Sanders responds to an essay by Salman Rushdie, both of which discuss the effect of mass migrations. Analyze the strategies Sanders uses to develop his perspective about moving.	Develop a position on the ethics of offering incentives for charitable acts and support your position with evidence from your reading, observation, and/or experience.
2007 Form B	Based on six sources concerning museum artifacts and decisions made to include a particular piece of art or an artifact. Develop a position on the most important considerations facing the person responsible for securing a new work of art or an artifact for a museum. Synthesize at least three of the sources for support.	In the <i>Introduction to Poison Penmanship: The Gentle Art of Muckraking</i> , Jessica Mitford says that it is an honor to be considered a muckraker. Do you agree or do you think that journalists who search out and expose real or apparent misconduct go too far in the pursuit of their stories. Explain your position.	Speech delivered by Wendell Phillips, a prominent white American abolitionist, praising Toussaint L’Ouverture, Haitian liberator. Analyze the strategies the speaker uses to praise his subject and move his audience.
2008	Based on seven sources concerning the elimination of the penny as the smallest American denomination. Develop a position on whether or not the penny should be eliminated and synthesize at least three of the sources for support.	Passage from John M. Barry’s <i>The Great Influenza</i> . Analyze how Barry uses rhetorical strategies to characterize scientific research.	Some people argue that corporate partnerships are a necessity for cash-strapped schools. Others argue that schools should provide an environment free from ads and corporate influence. Using appropriate evidence, write an essay in which you evaluate the pros and cons of corporate sponsorship for schools and indicate why you find one position more persuasive than the other.

2008 Form B	Based on six sources concerning a defined national school curriculum. Develop a position on whether or not there should be specific texts that all students of high school English should read. Synthesize at least three of the sources for support.	Passage from “America Needs Its Nerds” by Leonid Fridman. Analyze how Fridman develops his argument.	Read an excerpt from <i>The Decline of Radicalism</i> by Daniel Boorstin and consider the implications of the distinction Boorstin makes between dissent and disagreement. Defend, challenge, or qualify Boorstin’s distinction.
2009	Based on eight sources concerning space exploration. Develop a position about what issues should be considered most important in making decisions about space exploration and synthesize at least three of the sources for support.	Two passages from Edwin Wilson’s <i>The Future of Life</i> satirizing the language of two groups that hold opposing attitudes about environmentalism. Analyze how Wilson’s satire illustrates the unproductive nature of such discussions.	Write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Horace’s assertion that the role of adversity (financial or political hardship, danger, misfortune, etc.) plays in developing a person’s character. Support your argument with evidence from your reading, observation, or experience
2009 Form B	Based on seven sources concerning public education. Choose an issue related to the tension in schools between individuality and conformity. Write an essay in which you use this issue to argue the extent to which schools should support individuality or conformity. Synthesize at least three of the sources for support.	Passage from “The Indispensable Opposition” by Walter Lippmann. Analyze the strategies Lippmann uses to develop his argument.	Passage from <i>The Worst Years of Our Lives</i> by Barbara Ehrenreich, about life in the 1980s. Support, refute, or qualify Ehrenreich’s assertions about television.
2010	Based on six sources concerning information technology. Our daily lives seem to be saturated with television, computers, cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and MP3 players, etc. In an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support, evaluate the most important factors that a school should consider before using particular technologies in curriculum and instruction.	Excerpt from letter from Benjamin Banneker, former slave, to Thomas Jefferson (1791). Write an essay that analyzes how Banneker uses rhetorical strategies to argue against slavery.	In his 2004 book, <i>Status Anxiety</i> , Alain de Botton argues that the chief aim of humorists is not merely to entertain but “to convey with impunity messages that might be dangerous or impossible to state directly.” Think about the implications of de Botton’s view of the role of humorists (cartoonists, stand-up comics, satirical writers, hosts of television programs, etc.). Then write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies de Botton’s claim.
2010 Form B	Based on six sources concerning daylight savings time. Synthesize at least three of the sources into an essay that evaluates daylight saving time and offers a recommendation about its continued use.	Passage from <i>The Horizontal World</i> , Debra Marquart’s 2006 memoir about growing up in North Dakota. Analyze the strategies Marquart uses to characterize the upper Midwest.	The first Buy Nothing Day—a day on which people are urged to purchase no goods—was organized in Canada in 1992 as a way to increase awareness of excessive consumerism. Consider the implications of a day on which no goods are purchased. Then write an essay in which you develop a position on the establishment of an annual Buy Nothing Day.
2011	Based on seven sources concerning locavores, people who have decided to eat locally grown or produced products as much as possible, for sustainability and nutrition. Imagine that a community is considering organizing a locavore movement. In an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources identify the key issues associated with the locavore movement and examine their implications for the community.	Speech by Florence Kelley (1859-1932), a United States social worker and reformer who fought successfully for child labor laws and improved conditions for working women, delivered before the convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in Philadelphia on July 22, 1905. Analyze the rhetorical strategies Kelley uses to convey her message about child labor to her audience.	Passage from <i>Rights of Man</i> , a book written by the pamphleteer Thomas Paine in 1791. Born in England, Paine was an intellectual, a revolutionary, and a supporter of American independence from England. Write an essay that examines the extent to which Paine’s characterization of America holds true today.

<p>2011 Form B</p>	<p>Based on six sources concerning green living (practices that promote the conservation and wise use of natural resources). Synthesize at least three of the sources into an essay that develops a position on the extent to which government should be responsible for fostering green practices.</p>	<p>Letter written by Samuel Johnson in response to a woman who had asked him to obtain the archbishop of Canterbury’s patronage to have her son sent to the university. Write an essay in which you analyze how Johnson crafts his denial of the woman’s request.</p>	<p>American essayist and social critic H. L. Mencken (1880–1956) wrote, “The average man does not want to be free. He simply wants to be safe.” Examine the extent to which Mencken’s observation applies to contemporary society, supporting your position with appropriate evidence.</p>
<p>2012</p>	<p>Based on eight sources concerning the US Postal Service. Synthesize information from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay that argues a clear position on whether the USPS should be restructured to meet the needs of a changing world, and if so, how.</p>	<p>On April 10, 1962, as the United States was emerging from a recession, the nation’s largest steel companies raised steel prices by 3.5 percent. President John F. Kennedy, who had repeatedly called for stable prices and wages as part of a program of national sacrifice during a period of economic distress, held a news conference on April 11, 1962, which he opened with the following commentary regarding the hike in steel prices. Write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies President Kennedy uses to achieve his purpose.</p>	<p>Consider the distinct perspectives expressed in the following statements.</p> <p>“If you develop the absolute sense of certainty that powerful beliefs provide, then you can get yourself to accomplish virtually anything, including those things that other people are certain are impossible.” --<i>William Lyon Phelps, American educator, journalist, and professor (1865–1943)</i></p> <p>“I think we ought always to entertain our opinions with some measure of doubt. I shouldn’t wish people dogmatically to believe any philosophy, not even mine.” --<i>Bertrand Russell, British author, mathematician, and philosopher (1872–1970)</i></p> <p>In a well-organized essay, take a position on the relationship between certainty and doubt. Support your argument with appropriate evidence and examples.</p>
<p>2013</p>	<p>The need to memorialize events or people is complex; in some cases, monuments honor moments of great achievement, while in other cases, monuments pay homage to deep sacrifice. A monument’s size, location, and materials are all considerations in planning and creating a memorial to the past.</p> <p>Based on seven sources concerning memorialization. Synthesize information from at least three of the sources and incorporate into an essay that examines the factors a group or agency should consider in memorializing an event or person and in creating a monument.</p>	<p>Passage from <i>Last Child in the Woods</i> by Richard Louv. Write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies Louv uses to develop his argument about the separation between people and nature.</p>	<p>For centuries, prominent thinkers have pondered the relationship between ownership and the development of self (identity), ultimately asking the question, “What does it mean to own something?”</p> <p>Plato argues that owning objects is detrimental to a person’s character. Aristotle claims that ownership of tangible goods helps to develop moral character. Twentieth-century philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre proposes that ownership extends beyond objects to include intangible things as well. In Sartre’s view, becoming proficient in some skill and knowing something thoroughly means that we “own” it.</p> <p>Think about the differing views of ownership. Then write an essay in which you explain your position on the relationship between ownership and sense of self. Use appropriate evidence from your reading, experience, or observations to support your argument.</p>

<p>2014</p>	<p>Many recent college graduates have faced record levels of unemployment. This situation has led people to question what they value about higher education. Some high school students and their parents are wondering if a college education is worth the cost. Others, however, believe that a college education prepares students for more than just a job or career.</p> <p>Based on six sources concerning the value of a college education, Synthesize information from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay that evaluates whether college is worth its cost.</p>	<p>In a letter, Abigail Adams writes to her son John Quincy Adams, who is traveling abroad with his father, John Adams, a United States diplomat and later the country's second president. In a well-developed essay, analyze the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son.</p>	<p>Authors Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman published "The Creativity Crisis" in Newsweek.com in July 2010. They reported that the Torrance Test, a test of creativity that has been administered to millions of people worldwide in 50 languages, indicates that the public's "creativity quotient" has steadily crept downward since 1990. In their article, Bronson and Merryman cite the claim of Professor Kyung Hee Kim at the College of William and Mary: "It's very clear, and the decrease is very significant." Kim reports that it is the scores of younger children in America—from kindergarten through sixth grade—for whom the decline is "most serious."</p> <p>Bronson and Merryman state that "[t]he potential consequences are sweeping. The necessity of human ingenuity is undisputed. A recent IBM poll of 1,500 CEOs identified creativity as the No. 1 'leadership competency' of the future. Yet it's not just about sustaining our nation's economic growth. All around us are matters of national and international importance that are crying out for creative solutions, from saving the Gulf of Mexico to bringing peace to Afghanistan to delivering health care. Such solutions emerge from a healthy marketplace of ideas, sustained by a populace constantly contributing original ideas and receptive to the ideas of others."</p> <p>One possible approach to this reputed decline in creativity is to explicitly teach creative thinking in school. Write to your school board explaining what you mean by creativity and arguing for or against the creation of a class in creativity.</p>
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