

AP English Language and Composition

Course Overview

The primary objective of the AP English Language and Composition course is “to enable students to write effectively and confidently in (all) courses across the curriculum and in their professional and personal lives.” Students will focus on refining their abilities to create works demonstrating their capacity to express themselves through the specific use of various writing methods. The course will emphasize expository, analytical, and argumentative writing. These writing forms will be based on reading (both in-class and out-of-class assignments) as well as personal experiences and observations. Many assignments will integrate visual images with written texts. Students will analyze both forms together, distinguishing whether or not visual images are an acceptable alternative to written texts. Students will also participate in various research assignments using argumentative writing as the basis for structuring their ideas and opinions.

This course is structured to focus on skill development rather than focusing on specific themes or progressing through works chronologically. This does not mean we will avoid making connections amongst selected texts. We will deduce themes as we advance in rhetorical analysis. Our goal is to remain within American Literature throughout this course; however, we will not limit ourselves to one segment of literature if we determine an opportunity to expand our knowledge base exists outside of our original selections. The primary function of literature selection is to give us something to read that enables skill development. Your objective is to learn abilities in this class, not just memorize terms and answers.

You will develop writing skills that focus on risk-taking behaviors. We will work through multiple revisions on all assignments, making systematic improvements with each draft. Our reading selections will be the backbone for focused writing, covering various topics including (but not limited to): politics, pop culture, current events, entertainment, historical influences, and science.

Course Introduction

The first few days of school will introduce students to the AP course, including an overview of the syllabus, a discussion of critical thinking, and a review of expectations and procedures. We will use this time to set the norms for the classroom.

We will also discuss the purpose of the Wikispace website. I will include all handouts, assignments, and other useful resources on the Wikispace. This website will be integral to our course, so become familiar with its layout and it is recommended that you access it regularly.

First Six Weeks

Week One

- “Critical Thinking and Communication” – Edward Inch and Barbara Warnick
- “The Difficult Art of Maturity” – Eleanor Roosevelt
- Selection from “Survivor” – Chuck Palahniuk

During the first week we will develop a reason for thinking critically and discuss *how* critical thinking will benefit us throughout the year. We will use Inch and Warnick’s definition of critical thinking to discuss what maturity is and how it relates to thinking critically. Our understanding of maturity and critical thinking will be assessed through a written analysis of Palahniuk’s comments on fame and the modern world.

Weeks Two and Three

- Summer Reading Discussion/Assessment
- Selection from “The True Believer” – Eric Hoffer
- Overview of writing guidelines
- “Interdisciplinary Practice: A Student Guide to Research and Writing” – Repko
- “On Writing” – Stephen King
- “Ernest Hemingway on Writing” – Larry Phillips, Ed.
- “Why I Write” – George Orwell

The summer reading assessment will involve producing the first out-of-class essay of the year. I will post a rubric for the assignment on the class Wikispace. We will use the selection from Hoffer to guide us in the production of a class belief system that we will use throughout the year. This system will be aligned with the critical reading and writing methods discussed by Repko, King, Hemingway, and Orwell. I will also conduct an overview of the writing guidelines we will use for all writing assignments.

Week Four

- “They Say/I Say” – Graff and Birkenstein
- “Are We Rome?” – Cullen Murphy
- “Vatican’t: Instructions from Rome and Alabama” – *Politics: Observations and Arguments*
- Selections from *The New York Times*

We will begin developing a solid base for argumentative structure. Our primary text for this process will be *They Say/I Say* by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. While this will not be our sole text for rhetorical development, we will practice with many of the strategies introduced by Graff and Birkenstein. Your ability to distinguish between opinionated and unbiased writing will be crucial throughout this year. We will devote this week to introducing this ability and create an analytical framework that we will use for the remainder of the school year. You will complete your first analytical writing assignment this week over the Murphy selection and one article from *The New York Times*.

Week Five

- Selection from JFK's Inaugural Address
- Selection from Clinton's Inaugural Address (video)
- "Two Speeches" – Hendrik Hertzberg
- "Neighbors" – Raymond Carver

The key to writing a successful synthesis essay is the ability to discern an individual's claim. During the fifth week of school, we will look at three different examples of claims: 1) a claim from an individual about a topic; 2) a claim from an individual about another individual's claim; and 3) a claim from an individual through fiction. While these are not the only types of claims, the ability to distinguish where and how these claims exist will help in your development as a writer. We will also discuss how the effectiveness of the rhetorical strategies in a speech changes when the speech is experienced textually and visually.

Week Six

- Selection from "The 9/11 Commission Report"
- "Where Nothing Says Everything" – Suzanne Berne
- "How Much Wallop Can a Simple Word Pack" – Geoffrey Nunberg
- Connotation vs. Denotation Exercise
- Colin Powell's Speech on Iraq to the United Nations (Video)

Students will focus on reading documents surrounding an intense and complex topic. We will discuss the difference between what words say on the page and what they mean in practice. You will conduct an analysis of writers' motives, learning how to discover what people say without actually saying it. This week will lead into our current issues project, which will make intensive use of the synthesis process.

Skill development (i.e. reading and writing skills) in the remaining five grading periods will continue with the same structure as the first six weeks. While the content will vary, the abilities you will use will remain consistent, only increasing in complexity. You will continually re-evaluate your strengths and weaknesses to determine areas you can improve.

Second Six Weeks

Current Issues Project

Students will begin a project spanning four weeks. This project will include a narrowed research topic; gathering, evaluating, annotating, and documenting sources; preparing for and completing a timed writing; and delivering a persuasive speech that extends beyond basic reporting and instead presents a distinct argument. A bibliography is required at the conclusion of the project.

This project will require students to set aside time outside of class for research. The purpose of this project is to prepare for the synthesis essay on the AP exam. Students will use a specific submission and annotation process for all documents (examples can be found on the class Wikispace). This project will require you to distinguish between primary and secondary sources and how to use, evaluate, and cite these sources.

During the current issues project we will read several selections from *The New York Times*, “The Skeptical Environmentalist” (Lomborg), and the writings of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington. We will analyze the relationships between the current events we are researching and the selections listed above and discuss the argumentative similarities. This process will improve your understanding of the three essays you will complete for the AP exam. Using past AP exams, we will practice various techniques that will help you achieve success at the end of the course.

Upon completing the current issues project we will begin a brief unit on human communities and their environment. This unit will involve critical reading and writing assignments over the following selections (*Note: This list is not inclusive*):

- “Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed” – Jared Diamond
- “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire” – Edward Gibbon
- Selections from the “Debates on the Constitution: Part One”
- “Everything Bad is Good For You” – Steven Johnson
- “Is Global Warming a Threat?” – Greenhaven Press
- Selections from *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Dallas Morning News*, and various other news sources

Third Six Weeks

Novel: *In Cold Blood* – Truman Capote

During our reading of *In Cold Blood* we will conduct three passage analyses followed by a timed writing. Most of your reading will occur outside of the classroom. As we study *In Cold Blood*, you will practice the skills of passage analysis, a crucial component of the AP exam, through a meaningful and systematic process.

Alongside Capote’s work we will read selections from the following works: These selections will emphasize specific themes from the novel, such as *loss of innocence*, *family*, *self-image*, *socioeconomic status*, and *mental illness*:

- *New World Coming* – Nathan Miller
- “After the Plague” – T.C. Boyle
- “Big Boy” – David Sedaris
- *Fight Club* – Chuck Palahniuk
- *On Dreams* – Sigmund Freud
- *1984* – George Orwell

We also revisit our discussions of critical thinking from the first six weeks. Students will learn to approach conflicts through a deliberative process resulting in an ability to deduce

effective and responsible solutions to complex situations. We will look at the methods proposed by Makau and Marty in *Cooperative Argumentation* and discuss how their concepts can be used to successfully attack the argument essay on the AP exam.

Fourth Six Weeks

Major Works:

The Crucible – Arthur Miller (Play)

“Letter from Birmingham Jail” – Martin Luther King Jr.

Other Selections:

- Excerpts from the debates of House Committee on Un-American Activities
- Articles from *The New York Times* dated between March 28, 1968 and April 11, 1968
- “Cathedral” – Raymond Carver
- *A Rumor of War* – Philip Caputo
- *An Act of State* – William F. Pepper
- *The Making of an Assassin* – George McMillan
- “The Shell Game” – Stephen Kiesling
- “Lifeboat Ethics” – Garrett Hardin
- “The Plot Against People” – Russell Baker
- Robert Kennedy’s address after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. (video)

We will continue building on previous writing techniques and further develop proficiency in rhetorical analysis. An extensive use of primary sources will enhance students’ ability to discern “arguments” in every day occurrences. Students will continue to learn new and build upon previously taught composition skills, produce formal written compositions, and practice past AP essays.

Fifth Six Weeks

Major Works:

“A Modest Proposal” – Jonathan Swift

The Scarlet Letter (“The Prison Door”) – Nathaniel Hawthorne

Other Works:

- “A Talk to Teachers” – James Baldwin
- “What Teachers Make” – Taylor Mali (video)
- Selections from *Critical Theory Today* – Lois Tyson
- Various articles by Thomas Sowell (on education)
- Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills
- *Book of Five Rings* – Miyamoto Musashi
- Australian Curriculum Framework

Students will continue to build on skills from previous grading periods (i.e. rhetorical analysis, composition skills, syntactic variety, word choice, critical thinking/reading, vocabulary).

AP Essays: Students will complete one timed-writing a week until the AP exam.

Sixth Six Weeks

Major Work:

Fast Food Nation – Eric Schlosser

Other Selections:

- *Food Inc.* (Documentary)
- “The Bird and the Machine” – Loren Eiseley
- “The Clan of One Breasted Women” – Terry Williams
- Segments from *King Corn* (Documentary)
- Agricultural and Consumer Protection Act of 1973
- Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008
- “The Prison-Industrial Complex” – Eric Schlosser
- “The Penalty of Death” – H.L. Mencken

Students will continue to build on skills from previous grading periods (i.e. rhetorical analysis, composition skills, syntactic variety, word choice, critical thinking/reading, vocabulary).

AP Essays: Students will complete one timed-writing a week until the AP exam.

Post-exam: Review of the year; skills to maintain and practice for the summer; goals leading into your senior year

All students in the AP program are expected to take the exam. The AP exam replaces the final indicated in the school handbook. PLEASE NOTE THE AP EXAM IS NOT AN OPTION.

Grading Policy

Daily Work (Process) Grades	=	40%
Test (Product) Grades	=	40 %
Homework Grades	=	20%

Daily work (process) grades include:

- Participation
- Written and oral class work
- Quizzes

- Warm-ups
- Notebooks
- Response Journals

Test (product) grades include:

- Compositions
- Tests
- Projects
- Research Projects

Please note that the above list is not concrete. I may grade some process assignments as product assignments. *I WILL ALWAYS TELL YOU BEFORE I MAKE SUCH A CHANGE.*

Instructional Texts

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. New York, NY: Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2010. Print.

Inch, Edward S., and Barbara Warnick. *Critical Thinking and Communication: The Use of Reason in Argument*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2002. Print.

Makau, Josina M., and Debian L. Marty. *Cooperative Argumentation: A Model for Deliberative Community*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2001. Print.

Murfin, Ross C., and Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. Print.

Raimes, Ann. *Keys for Writers: A Brief Handbook*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. Print.

Repko, Allen. *Interdisciplinary Practice: A Student Guide to Research and Writing*. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing, 2005. Print.

Shea, Renée Hausmann., Lawrence Scanlon, and Robin Dissin. Aufses, comps. *The Language of Composition: Reading, Writing and Rhetoric*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008. Print.

Strunk, William, and Elwyn Brooks White. *The Elements of Style*. New York, NY: Longman, 2008. Print.

- Thurman, Susan. *The Only Grammar Book You'll Ever Need: A One-Stop Source for Every Writing Assignment*. Ed. Larry Shea. Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2003. Print.
- Troyka, Lynn Quitman, and Douglas Dean. Hesse. *Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005. Print.
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York, NY: Garland Publications, 1999. Print.
- Wood, Nancy V. *Writing Argumentative Essays*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001. Print.
- Zinsser, William Knowlton. *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998. Print.