AP English Language and Composition Test Review

Exam is 3 hours and 15 minutes long
1 hour: Multiple-Choice (50-60 questions), 45% of AP Grade
2 hours & 15 min: 3 Essays (1 synthesis, 1 rhetorical analysis, 1 persuasive), 55% of AP Grade

You will have a brief break after the Multiple-Choice section when you turn in your booklet. You will not be able to view your multiple-choice booklet or scan sheet after the break.

Materials You Will Need for AP Test
• sharpened #2 pencils
• several BLACK pens
• watch
• jacket/sweater (in case you get cold in room)
• You are not allowed to use highlighters on the exam

MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

• Consists of 50-60 questions
• You receive one point for each question you answer correctly. Do not leave any answers blank; guess if you have to.
• Contains 4-5 prose passages (may be fiction or non-fiction). Passages will include different styles, different time periods, and different purposes.
• Test is NOT graded for difficulty (Later questions may be easier, later passages may be easier.)
• If you finish the Multiple-Choice section early, go back and look over the questions that gave you the most difficulty.
• If time is not a problem for you, read the selections twice.

In order to be successful on the multiple-choice sections, you must
• follow sophisticated syntax
• respond to diction and vocabulary
• be familiar with rhetorical terminology – study your rhetorical terms
• make inferences from the reading
• be sensitive to tone and irony
• recognize organization and style
• be familiar with modes of discourse, and rhetorical organization and strategies.

Multiple-Choice Strategies
• Underline, mark, and circle text (no highlighting allowed)
• Pay attention to the author’s meaning, purpose, audience, and tone as you read
• Note the author’s name, title of work, copyright and footnotes (if provided)
• Pay attention to the organization of the passage (chronological, cause-effect, process, etc.)
• Underline the author’s theme(s) and details
• Do not rely on your memory: go back and find information in passage.
• Before reading the passages, read the questions, but NOT the answers. Often, this helps you focus your understanding of the passage as it directs you to key words and ideas.

Types of Multiple-Choice Questions
• Questions about Rhetoric:
  The passage is an example of...
  The phrase “________” has the effect of...
  The style of the passage can best be characterized as...
• References to lines to draw conclusions or interpretations
Lines 52-57 serve to...
If you are asked about specific lines of a passage, read at least two lines above and two lines below the stated lines in order to understand the context of the specific lines.

- The “All…Except” questions
- Make an inference or abstract a concept not stated
  *The reader can infer...*
- Roman-Numeral Time-Consuming Questions
  - I. A only  II Both A & B , etc.
  Note: These are the most time-consuming questions. If you are short of time, skip these questions and come back to them after you have finished the others.

Specific Strategies for Multiple-Choice Questions
- Work questions in the order in which they appear on the test.
- Write notes in exam booklet
- Quickly read questions before reading the passage.
- Do not take too long on any one question
- Do not be misled by length of selections (shortest sections may be the most difficult)
- Questions are not graded according to difficulty. The easiest questions may be the final questions on the test.
- Work within the given context (ignore prior knowledge you may have about the topic)
- Consider all choices for each question
- Remember that all parts of an answer must be correct; don’t be steered to wrong answers because one part of it seems so correct.

ESSAY SECTION
- You will be given all three topics at the beginning of the essay test. You will have 15 minutes to read the passages and topics and take notes before you begin writing.
- After the 15-minute reading period, you will have 2 hours to write the three essays. You will be prompted about the time after 40 minutes, and prompted once again after 80 minutes.
- Each essay counts the same
- You will be given a booklet of 12 pages of paper to write your essays. Write in BLACK ink. If you need more paper, you may ask the proctor. WRITE AS NEATLY AS YOU CAN.
- Read the free response/persuasive question before beginning the essays. Think about your evidence for this question as you work on other essays, and write down any ideas that come to you before going back to the other essays. You will not remember your ideas, so write them down as they come to you on the prompt while you are writing the other essays.
- AP graders believe your level of writing is a reflection of your critical thinking skills. SO.... Think about and plan your essay before you begin writing.

Rhetorical Analysis Essay

**Types**
- Analyze an author’s view on a specific subject
- Analyze rhetorical devices author uses to achieve purpose
- Analyze stylistic elements in passage and their effect
- Analyze author’s tone and how author conveys the tone — THINK DICTION!
- Compare/Contrast two passages in regard to style, purpose, or tone.
- Analyze author’s purpose and how he or she achieves the purpose
- Analyze how an author presents him or herself in the passage
- Discuss the intended and/or probable effect of the passage.
- Thesis ➞ Topic sentences RELATED to thesis ➞ claim ➞ evidence ➞ ANALYSIS

Things you must know in order to accurately analyze a text:
1. SOAPS – Identify the Subject, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, and Speaker (author) of the text. This is how you
will determine if the rhetorical strategies used are effective.

2. Rhetorical Strategies
a. Appeals (ethos, logos, pathos)
b. Style (diction, imagery, details, language, syntax, tone, etc.)

3. Why did the author choose these strategies for the particular audience, occasion, and/or purpose?
a. This is the analysis part! Without this, you are merely summarizing the text.
b. Think about these questions:
   -- HOW do the rhetorical strategies help the author achieve his/her purpose?
   -- WHY does the author choose those strategies for that particular audience and for that particular occasion?
   -- SAYS (what the text literally says/argues) – DOES (how the author does this) – BECAUSE (why do these rhetorical choices work in this rhetorical situation (think about SOAPS)

Once you’ve identified the information above, it’s time to begin putting your thoughts and ideas into a format that proves you have accurately analyzed the text. There are many ways to write an effective rhetorical analysis essay. Below is one way that is a good, simple format to help you get started. You may deviate from this format as long as you are still focusing on numbers 1-3 from above.

**Introduction:**
The introductory paragraph to an analysis essay is usually brief. However, it must contain some essential information.

Use SOAPS in your introduction in a format similar to this:

In 1986 after the Challenger space shuttle exploded, killing all seven astronauts on board including an elementary school teacher, the country was consumed with grief over the very public tragedy. President Ronald Reagan spoke to the nation that evening from the White House (speaker, occasion, audience, subject). In his address, Reagan attempts to unite the nation by comforting those who witnessed the horrific event, commemorating the brave astronauts, and encouraging future space exploration even in the light of such tragedies (purpose). He initially adopts a solemn tone, expresses empathy by referencing his own family to highlight the grief of the astronauts’ families, and ultimately recasts the dead astronauts as pioneers expressing the greatest ideals of American exploration (thesis).

**Notice how the introduction uses a SAYS/DOES/BECause structure.**

**Body:**
This is the analysis part! This is where you include a detailed analysis of strategies used by the writer. When writing an analysis, it is crucial that you work chronologically through the text. This means that you start at the beginning of the text and work your way through it by discussing what the writer is saying and the effectiveness of the strategies he/she is using at the beginning, middle, and end of the text. Sometimes this means that you will discuss each paragraph (one at a time), and sometimes this means that you will divide the text into sections and discuss the beginning, middle, and end of the text. Whether you discuss each paragraph or each section depends on the length and organization of the text itself. To help you move chronologically through the text, there are transition words you can use, such as the author begins, opens, closes, contrasts, shifts to, juxtaposes, ends, moves to, etc.

**Every analysis paragraph MUST:**
1) Identify the part of the text you are analyzing by using transition words and strong verbs to explain what is being said.

2) Identify the strongest rhetorical strategies used in that particular section. This includes incorporating specific text examples (exact words from the text, in quote marks) into your own words. Do NOT try to discuss every strategy the writer uses; pick the strongest!

3) Clearly and specifically explain how the rhetorical strategies are used to help the writer achieve his purpose and reach his audience.

4) The above items must be woven together seamlessly into one sophisticated paragraph of the body of your
analysis essay. A body paragraph sample is below:

from President Reagan’s speech after the space shuttle Challenger explosion:

1. The first sentence identifies which section of the text you are discussing, the main idea of that section, and your analytical assertion about that section (this is a topic sentence, and must be an argument related directly to your thesis):

Reagan first appeals to the emotions of the audience by referencing his personal grief, and then extending that reference to the nation as a whole in order to both emphasize his leadership and unite the country.

2. The second sentence introduces your evidence for your assertion from the first sentence:

Reagan admits that “Nancy and I are pained to the core” by the tragedy, and acknowledges that today is rightfully a “day for mourning and remembering,” and that the accident is “truly a national loss.” He broadens his viewpoint to cover all Americans, and by beginning with his family and moving to the nation, he portrays himself as a leader and as a person who feels pain like everyone else does.

3. The third sentence explains how the rhetorical choices you discussed in the previous sentence(s) help the writer achieve his purpose, often by using an in order to statement — the “because.”

He joins in this time of mourning in order to unify the nation, and humbly admits that “we share this pain with all of the people of our country,” suggesting the tragedy is a personal loss for him as well as a loss for the astronaut families and for the nation.

4. The fourth sentence identifies the effect of the writer’s use of these rhetorical strategies on the audience — part of the “because” statement.

This outpouring of emotion from the president conveys a calming tone that reassures the nation that their grief is both understandable and proper.

Put it all together and this is what one paragraph of the body of a rhetorical analysis essay might look like:

Reagan first appeals to the emotions of the audience by referencing his family, and then extending that reference to the nation as a whole in order to both express his own leadership and unite the country. Reagan admits that “Nancy and I are pained to the core” by the tragedy, and acknowledges that today is rightfully a “day for mourning and remembering,” and that the accident is “truly a national loss.” He broadens his viewpoint to cover all Americans, and by beginning with his family and moving to the nation, he portrays himself as a leader and as a person who feels pain like everyone else does. He joins in this time of mourning in order to unify the nation, and humbly admits that “we share this pain with all of the people of our country,” suggesting the tragedy is a personal loss for him as well as a loss for the astronaut families and for the nation. This outpouring of emotion from the president conveys a calming tone that reassures the nation that their staggering grief is both understandable and proper.

You will do this again with a second and third rhetorical strategy, resulting in at least 3 body paragraphs.

Potential topic sentences:
Paragraph 2:
In commemorating the astronauts, Reagan adopts a more resolute tone to remind the country that their deaths were not in vain.

Paragraph 3:
Finally, Reagan appeals to American patriotism by recommitting the nation’s resources to space exploration.

Conclusion
Be brief. In 3-4 sentences, remind the reader what you said in your introduction, but with new references from the text. Often, you can conclude with a quote from near the end of the text you are analyzing:
President Reagan’s Challenger speech was designed to present Reagan as an ordinary person sharing in the American people’s grief, but also allowed him to appear steadfast and in charge. He was successful in asserting continued space exploration as a fitting testament to the astronauts who died. He closed his speech as he opened it, with a strong appeal to emotion, emphasizing that “we will never forget them.”

Use the Natural Divisions of the Piece to Create Your Structure
Have a clear structure. Almost every piece will contain easy places to divide. Create subarguments for each section.

Strong vs. Weak Verbs
To help you avoid summary and move to ANALYSIS, you need to incorporate strong verbs into your writing when discussing the writer’s rhetorical choices. Below is a list of verbs that are considered weak because they imply summary and a list of verbs that are considered strong because they imply analysis. Strive to use the stronger verbs in your essays to help push yourself away from summary and toward analysis: “The writer flatters…” NOT “The writer says…”

WEAK VERBS (Summary)
Says, relates, goes on to say, tells, this quote shows, explains, states

STRONG VERBS (Analysis)
implies trivializes flatters qualifies processes
describes suggests denigrates lionizes dismisses
analyzes questions compares vilifies praises
supports enumerates contrasts emphasizes demonizes
establishes admonishes expounds argues defines
ridicules minimizes narrates lists warns

Powerful and meaningful verbs to use in your analyses

Alternatives to “show”

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### Analyzing DICTION

**Diction** means the words the writer chooses to convey a particular meaning. When analyzing diction, look for **specific words** or short phrases that seem stronger than the others. Diction is NEVER the entire sentence! Also, look for a **pattern** (or similarity) in the words the writer chooses (ex. Do the words imply sadness, happiness, anger, etc?). This pattern helps to create a particular kind of diction. This pattern can also include **repetition** of the same words or phrases. Repeating the same word or phrase helps the reader emphasize a point, feeling, etc.

Effective diction is shaped by words that are clear, concrete, and exact. Good writers avoid words like *pretty, nice,* and *bad* because they are not specific enough. Instead, they rely on words that invoke a specific effect in order to bring the reader into the event being described.

**Examples:**
- A coat isn’t *torn*; it is *tattered*.
- A crime victim does not *want* revenge; he is *thirsting* for revenge.
- A door does not *shut*; it *thuds*.

Diction depends on **subject, occasion, audience, purpose, and speaker** — and it establishes **TONE**.

*Below are just a few words that you may use to describe the type of diction used by the writer. Do NOT say a writer “uses diction”; say a writer “uses (scholarly, sentimental, inflammatory, etc.) diction."

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### Analyzing SYNTAX

**Syntax** refers to the way words are arranged within sentences.

**Schemes**

One aspect of syntax is schemes. Most English sentences follow a subject-verb-object pattern (ex. *I went to the store."

) Deviating from this pattern can serve to add emphasis to the author’s ideas. [See the scheme section of your rhetorical terms handout for different ways authors can change the pattern of their sentences.]

**Sentence Length**

Another aspect of syntax is sentence length. Good writers will use a variety for emphasis.
Sentence Type
A third aspect of syntax is sentence type. Again, good writers use a variety.
- **Simple**: subject-verb (I went to the store.)
- **Compound**: 2 independent clauses joined by a conjunction (I went to the store, and I bought candy.)
- **Complex**: independent clause and dependent clause (While traveling to the store, I saw my friend.)
- **Compound-complex**: 2 independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses (While traveling to the store, I saw my friend, and she gave me money for candy.)
- **Declarative**: statement (I went to the store.)
- **Exclamatory**: strong feeling (What a wonderful candy store!)
- **Interrogative**: question (Is this a candy store?)
- **Imperative**: command (Go to the store.)

Punctuation
A final aspect of syntax is punctuation. Yes, good writers use a variety here, too.
- **Semicolon (;)** gives equal weight to two or more independent clauses in a sentence – it takes the place of a period, not a comma.
  Writers use this to reinforce parallel ideas and show how both ideas are equally important. Ex.: Some people appreciate the wit of politically incorrect humor; others find it offensive in most cases.
- **Colon (:)** directs the reader’s attention to the words that follow. Writers use this to show the reader that the information after the colon is important. Ex.: There are two reasons to be concerned: money and time.
- **Dash (—)** marks a sudden change in thought or tone, sets off a brief summary, or acts as a parenthetical pause. Ex.: The student hoped the final exam — which his teacher said would be brutal — wouldn’t ruin his course grade.

Analyzing TONE
**Tone** is the writer’s attitude or feeling about the subject of his text. It is a special kind of rhetorical strategy because **tone is created by the writer’s use of all of the other rhetorical strategies.**
- **Diction & Tropes** (figures of speech, words used to mean something other than their dictionary definitions)
- **Syntax & Schemes** (diversion from normal word order in sentences)
- **Details & Lack of Details**
When discussing an author’s tone, you must be careful to **choose the right word.** Below is a small list of tone words (there are hundreds). Use them in your essay to describe the tone of the piece, but only if you are sure you know the word’s meaning (not sure? look them up).
When **writing your essay**, avoid saying: “The writer uses tone” since ALL writers use tone of some kind. Instead, say: “The writer creates a (sympathetic, bitter, condescending, etc.) tone by…[rhetorical strategy].”

**Words to describe tone:**

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Tips for Writing the Synthesis Essay

What is a “synthesis” essay? It is a short research paper. You are given resources to use in support of a thesis that you develop after you (quickly!) read the prompt and resources. You will have 15 minutes to read and consider a collection of resources: excerpts from articles, books, and journals, photographs, charts and graphs, illustrations or cartoons. There will always be one or two graphics for you to “read.” As you read these resources, you must annotate them relative to the prompt. READ THE PROMPT CAREFULLY. Understand its subject and your task. Use the prompt as a lens as you read the resources.

1) The Synthesis Essay, like the Persuasive Essay, is likely to offer one of three types of prompts. The prompt will ask you to: defend, challenge, or qualify a claim; develop a position on a given topic; or evaluate several factors related to a topic, and develop a position. Annotate the prompt, underline its verbs, be sure you know precisely what you are being asked to do.

2) Write your thesis, which should be a clear (generally one sentence) statement expressing your opinion and showing what you will argue. Use the prompt to create your thesis. Stick to the limits of what you are being asked to do – do not go “rogue” and wander away from the prompt.

3) Quickly outline your main points (shoot for three) on your planning page. Write it out. Do NOT try to keep your outline in your head and just start writing.

4) Use the minimum number of resources your prompt requires (usually three or four), but do not worry about having to use more. You may, but you do not have to and will not lose points for failing to do so. Citing all of the resources will NOT make your paper stronger.

5) Do not merely adopt the arguments you see in the resources. Consider yourself as a writer who participates in a conversation with the sources. Your case should indicate critical thinking on your part — going beyond what the sources have said. Your own observations on and knowledge of the given subject are important, too.

Incorporating and Citing Materials from Your Sources

1) Use signal phrases to introduce your sources, ideally identifying them by name and title or organization, such as: As UCLA researcher Lori Smith suggests…; According to Sam Jones, director of the College Testing Board, …; U.S. Census Bureau data show that…”

…and then cite the source at the end by its letter in parentheses: (Source B).

Examples:

Therefore, it is unfair to blame the increase in childhood obesity on soft drink consumption. As Kristen Powers of the Grocery Manufactures of America points out, “The rise in obesity is the result of many complex factors affecting eating and activity behaviors, and there are no simple solutions” (Source C).

In “The Demise of Dailies: An Honest Look” Sanders says that the availability of newspapers online helps “democratize society because anyone with internet can access not only the local paper, but also national and international papers” (Source D).

As found in a study by the University of Ottawa, countries that embrace animal rights tend to have less crime overall (Source A).
2) Avoid saying: *As Source C suggests...* or *As shown in Source B...*. While it is technically accurate, it is unsophisticated. In most cases, you will be able to cite the resource either by its author or its source (see examples above), and save the “Source A, Source B” stuff for your parenthetical citations.

3) Use both direct and indirect quotations from the resources you include. This means do not be overly reliant on direct quotations. Use some, but also paraphrase some of your source material, continuing to use appropriate citations. Summarizing and paraphrasing requires skills beyond merely adding quotations from sources, which is why the AP requires you to do both. Being able to use both types of references demonstrates your skill as a writer.

a) Cite only what is needed, not more, not less. If you only need a small phrase from a quotation, use that. Generally speaking, use direct quotations when you cannot say it better in a paraphrase than the original, and avoid long quotations. They should ALWAYS become a part of a sentence of your own prose.

b) Do not awkwardly change the tense of a quote using parentheses in order to fit your prose. Use paraphrasing instead.

c) When paraphrasing, be careful not to interpret. Shorten the work with precision, keeping the exact argument intact. Do not misrepresent evidence to make it fit your thesis. You may even use some exact words or phrases from the original, but you will be writing your own statement (with citation, of course!).

d) End every paragraph with your own sentence, not with a quote. The essay is yours, so your voice must dominate it. Even in your conclusion, if you use an engaging quotation, end with one more sentence of your own prose to signal your complete ownership of the essay.

**Example body paragraph:**

Bottle recycling is one area where environmental efforts have fallen far short of the nation’s goals *(topic sentence)*. Jones argues that bottle recycling programs have been more costly than beneficial, noting that “the nation now spends untold billions just to store used bottles, and most of those end up in landfills eventually” *(direct quote, embedded with the writer’s own prose)*. Smith, in her MIT research, emphasizes that aggressive recycling programs led to a doubling and even tripling of household waste *(paraphrase)*. Clearly, though the bill’s sponsors intended to clean up litter, they created an even bigger pollution problem in the nation’s landfills. Much of what we do in the name of recycling is a myth – even a destructive myth – but it satisfies our need to believe we are good people.

*[analysis related to your thesis]*

**Example without notations:**

Bottle recycling is one area where environmental efforts have fallen far short of the nation’s goals. Jones argues that bottle recycling programs have been more costly than beneficial, noting that “the nation now spends untold billions just to store used bottles, and most of those end up in landfills eventually” *(Source C)*. Smith, in her MIT research, emphasizes that aggressive recycling programs led to a doubling and even tripling of household waste *(Source A)*. Clearly, though the bill’s sponsors intended to clean up litter, they created an even bigger pollution problem in the nation’s landfills. Much of what we do in the name of recycling is a myth – even a destructive myth – but it satisfies our need to believe we are good people.

4) Provide analysis of your evidence: What does this quotation demonstrate, reveal, or suggest regarding your thesis? *See example just above.*

For body paragraphs, generally do the following:

– open with a claim directly related to your thesis
– use source materials to support it, using signal phrases, argument verbs, and parenthetical citations *(Source A, Source B, etc.)*
– provide analysis of the quotation/paraphrase relative to your claim
– link the material back to your thesis.
Citation/Argument Verbs

Here are a few verbs you might use to introduce or follow quotations and paraphrases:

- argues
- reveals
- claims
- emphasizes
- underscores
- indicates
- points out
- suggests
- recommends
- advises
- proposes
- concludes
- asserts
- speculates
- implies
- believes

AP English Language Persuasive Essay

The AP English Language & Composition persuasive essay question can ask you to create and support an argument in a variety of ways, and the phrasing frequently changes so it is essential that you read the prompt closely, identify its verbs, and respond appropriately. One bit of phrasing that has changed little over time, however, is the admonition that you “support your argument” using “appropriate evidence.” Here are examples of the most typical AP English Language persuasive prompts:

1) **Defend, challenge, or qualify** a quotation about, or particular take on, a specific topic. (Note: The meaning of “qualify” is discussed later in this document)

   **Example:**
   In the *Spectator* for December 15, 1711, Joseph Addison wrote: *If the talent of ridicule were employed to laugh men out of vice and folly, it might be of some use to the world; but instead of this, we find that it is generally made use of to laugh men out of virtue and good sense, by attacking everything that is solemn and serious, decent and praiseworthy in human life.*

   Write a carefully reasoned persuasive essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Addison’s assertion. Use appropriate evidence from your observation, experience, or reading to develop your position.

2) **Evaluate** the pros and cons of an argument and then indicate why you find one position more persuasive than another. You will indicate which side you find more persuasive in your thesis; do not save this for the end of your paper.

   **Example:**
   In “The Singer Solution to World Poverty,” an article that appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, Peter Singer, a professor of bioethics, calls attention to the urgent need for food and medicine in many parts of the world. Singer argues that prosperous people should donate to overseas aid organizations such as UNICEF or Oxfam America all money not needed for the basic requirements of life. “The formula is simple: Whatever money you’re spending on luxuries, not necessities, should be given away.”

   Write an essay in which you evaluate the pros and cons of Singer’s argument. Use appropriate evidence as you examine each side, and indicate which position you find more persuasive.

3) **Take a position** on whatever debatable statement is provided in the prompt. This type of prompt will often ask you to explain how you would define an issue, and then take a position. Again, take your position in your thesis.

   **Example:**
   The practice of offering incentives for charitable acts is widespread, from school projects to fund drives by organizations such as public television stations, to federal income tax deductions for contributions to charities. In a well-written essay, develop a position on the ethics of offering incentives for charitable acts. Support your position with appropriate evidence from your reading, observation, and/or experience.
Unlike the other two essays you will be asked to write, this essay does not provide any text other than the short prompt. Instead, your thesis is supported by your own reading, observations, and experiences. In other words, this essay’s only support is you; what you “know” is the textual support. This essay can be difficult, as the question, regardless of what it is, presupposes that you have knowledge about the topic under discussion. The more you’ve learned about the world around you, and the more opinions you have formulated about it, the better.

If you choose to defend what the text argues, you will give reasons that support the argument given. If you choose to challenge what the text argues, your reasoning will contradict the argument. If you choose to qualify what the text argues, you will agree with parts of the statement and disagree with others. Or, you might agree with the statement, but only under certain circumstances. Sometimes it can be easy to think about the “qualify” argument as an 80%-20% agree-disagree formula.

Note: It is almost always preferable to choose the qualified response. It will make your response seem more nuanced and sophisticated. If you can’t, it is especially critical to use effective naysayers (counterarguments) in the course of the essay. Make sure that you clearly address the author/quote (if present) from the prompt. Make it clear that you understand/define the position that the speaker is taking.

The “pros and cons” essay is similar to the “qualify” essay in that you must give reasons both supporting and contradicting the statement. You must then try to persuade why one side is more convincing with appropriate evidence. The “position” essay requires that you establish a specific position in your thesis in response to the statement, and then support it with evidence.

As always, the thesis for these essay prompts must be specific and focused. Avoid merely restating what the prompt states. Instead, make the prompt your own by articulating a specific argument.

(Common Mistakes on the Persuasive Essay)

1. Misreading the prompt; not understanding the task – Underline those verbs; do what you are being asked to do.
2. Merely paraphrasing the quote/passage, with no argument – Refer to the passage, yes, but only briefly as you indicate its assertion, then get on with YOUR argument, YOUR assertions, YOUR evidence. It can be easy to fall into an essay that is merely restating what the prompt says over and over.
3. Not taking a clear, definite stand – Your reader should know, by the end of your introduction, specifically what position your essay will defend. Your topic sentences should be argumentative and in support of your thesis. Your position should be consistent and glaringly obvious.
4. Inappropriate or weak evidence – This can mean something like too many personal anecdotes or relying on hypothetical “if this happened…then that would happen” evidence. Scorers want you to be logical, reasoned, analytical, and demonstrate that you are learned and well read.
5. Writing a rhetorical analysis of the passage/prompt instead of a persuasive essay – Many, many students do this. The passage offers an opinion/assertion, with which you will agree or disagree. It is not important how, rhetorically, that opinion has been offered to you.

How do I argue a point or position?

1. Present the issue/situation/problem.
3. Support your claim drawing on all that you know about the subject: what you’ve experienced, read, or observed – generally AVOID personal anecdotes (unless it is REALLY on point) and pop culture/celebrity references. Your goal is to sound well read, educated, and reasoned. Look to history, current events, government, science, technology, human behavior, sports, the community, and literature for your evidence as much as you can.
4. Acknowledge and respond to real or possible opposing views. In many cases, the “qualify” argument is stronger than the “agree” or “disagree” argument because it marks you as a thinker who is able to consider viewpoints other than your own, and respect others’ opinions, traits which develop your ethos as a writer. Most assertions presented in the prompt are those about which reasonable people can disagree. But, you still must make a clear argument – you are trying to persuade – and avoid falling into a trap of presenting equal sides of an issue while taking no position, which is explanation rather than argument.

5. Conclude by extending the topic to the “real world.”

The order of the presentation can be varied, and any rhetorical strategies can be employed, but you must make certain that your support/evidence is appropriate and effective. Your support should be rational and logical, not emotional; it should be objective rather than biased.

Work the Prompt
Carefully read and deconstruct the prompt. A successful essay will depend on your thorough understanding of what is expected of you. Underline key ideas, concepts, etc.

Develop the Opening Paragraph
Your introduction should not a) be a generalized statement about human nature/society, b) just fill the page with no purpose, c) be obviously false, d) offer a weak question or quotation, or e) open with a generalized truism.

Instead, it should be “STAMP-Y”:
  a) Shock your audience with a statistic
  b) Tell a story or establish a scenario
  c) Analogize with an effective comparison
  d) Make a good question that does not have an easy answer
  e) Personalize with an effective anecdote

Effective introductions lead with powerful adjective and verbs.
OKAY: When you drink a glass of milk, you’re getting more than wholesome calories…
BETTER: Pus. Hormones. Mucous. Hardly what we imagine each time we take a drink from a glass of milk …

Thesis statement needs to be an argument that raises a controversial point and clearly articulates the reasons you will argue in your piece
  • Refer specifically to the prompt
  • Clearly state your position (thesis) relative to the prompt as it is asked (i.e., rather than saying “I think the death penalty is wrong,” say something like “Smith is wrong in his assertion that the death penalty is good public policy because…”)

Develop the Body
• First plan: What will you use as evidence to support your position?
  – facts/statistics, details, quotations, anecdotes, cause and effect, appeal to authority, etc. Remember history, current events, government, science, technology, human behavior, sports, the community, and literature.
• What are the best arguments against my position; how will I address those?

Naysayers are an effective strategy to add depth to paragraphs by engaging with and responding to an alternative point of view in your piece. Remember to always raise a fair objection (not a strawperson) and answer it fully.

GENERAL NAYSAYER: Some may challenge the assertion that______________________________.
NAMED NAYSAYER: Many feminists would probably object that _________ or Social Darwinists would certainly take issue with the argument that _________.

Refutation Paragraph Strategy
Topic Sentence (1): [The other side said]
Summary of Opposition (1-2) [include a source, summarize opposition concisely]
Refutation of Opposition (3-5) [CRUSH their argument]

Conclusion
• What will my final remarks be? Leave the reader with a sense of completion, and reinforce your thesis. Consider: a) bookending the anecdote from the introduction, b) raising a thoughtful question, c) offering a future implication, or d) contextualizing the issue with a comparison to a current event.

Review
• Take a stand on the issue!
• Do precisely what the prompt asks you to do. Underline its verbs: “defend, challenge or qualify; evaluate the pros and cons; take a position”
• Provide support for your position by using: Facts, details, examples, anecdotes, etc., from what you’ve read, learned, experienced, etc.
• Do NOT use “what ifs,” “this or that could happen” or other hypothetical situations in your argument; focus on what you know.
• Do NOT use sweeping generalizations – avoid phrases like “everyone believes,” “all people agree,” etc., or vague/lame statements like “pollution is a problem…”

Organization of Persuasive Essay
1) Present the issue/situation/problem
2) State your assertion/claim/thesis
3) Support your claim
4) Acknowledge and respond to real or possible opposing views
5) Make your final comment extending the discussion to the real world.
6) Thesis ➞ Topic sentences related to thesis ➞ Claim ➞ Evidence ➞ ANALYSIS

Final Advice for Writing Essays
• You will have a greater chance of making a higher score if your essays are longer. (This assumes, of course, that your essays are longer because they are packed with additional examples and analysis.) Judges will give you credit for what you get RIGHT. If you have time, aim for 4-5 paragraphs, and an essay of 2-3 pages. This is also why you do NOT want to finish early. If your papers are longer and are on target, you will make a higher score.

• Make the first line or two of your introductions interesting in order to capture your reader’s attention and make your paper memorable. Avoid clichés, old sayings, etc. Provide a satisfying conclusion (consider referring back to something from your introduction to give a sense of the essay coming full circle).

• Read the question and writing prompt several times. Make sure you address the topic specifically and don’t waste your time analyzing something that is not part of the essay assignment. If you write a wonderful essay that is off topic, your score will be exceedingly low. Do what the prompt asks you to do!

Concepts You Need to Know for AP Language and Composition Test
• Modes of Discourse (narration, exposition, description, argumentation)
• Author’s Style (details, pacing, syntax, imagery, diction, use of rhetorical devices)
• Methods of Organization (chronological, general to specific, specific to general, contrast, cause and effect, etc.)
• Point of View (1st person, 3rd person objective, omniscient, stream of consciousness)
• Tone (bitter, sarcastic, ironic, spiritual, humorous, pedantic, objective, sentimental, reflective, sad, etc.)
• 3 Rhetorical Appeals: Ethos (Ethics), Pathos (Emotions), and Logos (Logic). If you are asked how an author constructs his argument, always see if these three appeals fit in some way.

Methods of Rhetorical Organization/Patterns of Development

Writers will use one of the patterns below to organize both an entire essay and/or parts of an essay. By identifying the organizational pattern of a piece of writing, one can be more successful in identifying the author’s purpose.

Narration — Telling a story or recounting a series of events.

Description — Closely allied with narration as both include specific details. Description, however, emphasizes the senses by painting a picture of how something looks, sounds, smells, tastes, or feels. It is often used to establish a mood or atmosphere.

Process Analysis — Explains how something works, how to do something, or how something was done.

Exemplification — Provides a series of examples – facts, specific cases, etc. – to turn a general idea into a concrete one; this makes argument clearer and more persuasive for the reader.

Analogy is a method of development that explains something abstract or difficult to understand by comparing it to something simpler and more concrete, with which the reader is likely to be familiar.

Cause and Effect is a seemingly simple method of development in which either the cause of a particular effect or the effects of a particular cause are investigated.

Classification/Division is the division of a whole into the classes that comprise it; or the placement of a subject into the whole of which it is a part. Some connections are obvious – married, widowed, divorced – while others are more complex – what goes into the category “texts with literary merit”?

Comparison and Contrast — Juxtaposing two things to show how they are similar and different. Many times, the differences and similarities (such as between two pieces of writing) are subtle, but nonetheless can be discerned by looking closely at the tools of rhetoric.

Definition, in rhetoric, it is the meaningful extension (usually enriched by the use of detail, concrete illustration, anecdote, metaphor) of a logical definition in order to answer fully, clearly, and often implicitly the question, “What is _____?” To ensure that writer and audiences are speaking the same language, definition may lay the foundation to establish common ground.

Scoring of Essays

• Graders reward what a student does well. Do what the prompt is asking you to do…and do it well.
• Graders want to see interesting, insightful, and well-constructed essays.

***** Do not spend so much time on two essays that you never or barely write the third essay. Different graders see different essays; therefore, they cannot take into consideration that one of your essays may be weak because another was so strong. **Allow equal time to all essays.**