

2013-2014 AP English Language and Composition

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Overview of course:

College professors frequently lament the poor writing skills of the students who enter their classrooms, particularly straight out of high school. This course is designed to help you succeed in not only a freshman composition course, but in college altogether. To achieve this goal, students must learn to think critically, read analytically, and communicate with clarity and confidence. In this course, you will learn how to read closely and annotate a variety of formats, genres, and topics — including aspects of American Literature.

While students may earn college credit if they receive a 3, 4, or 5 on the AP English Language and Composition Exam (depending on their chosen college), the overarching goal of this course is to prepare students for the rigors of college writing.

The AP College Board describes this mission best:

An AP course in English Language and Composition engages students in becoming skilled readers of prose written in a variety of periods, disciplines, and rhetorical contexts, and in becoming skilled writers who compose for a variety of purposes. Both their writing and their reading should make students aware of the interactions among a writer's purposes, audience expectations, and subjects as well as the way generic conventions and the resources of language contribute to effectiveness in writing. (The College Board, *AP English Course Description*, May 2008, p. 6)

Grading:

Major Assignments – 60% (1-2 per quarter)

- Summative assessments that allow students to demonstrate mastery of the skills from that unit/semester. These will include mid-term and semester final timed essays, summative essays/assignments for each novel, the This I Believe essay, and the large research project.

Formative Assessments – 30%

- **Practice Essays**
Frequent and regular practice using different essay questions from previous AP exams. Typically, these essays will be assigned for homework. Students' writing on these essays will reflect not only the type of essay (Rhetorical Analysis, Synthesis, Argumentative) the class is studying at the time, but also the particular writing skills we're working on (sentence fluency/structure, word choice, organization, supporting claims with data and commentary, etc.). On the due date, students will work in revision teams to discuss suggestions for improvement. Students may at any time be asked to complete revisions using their peers' suggestions and turn in both original and revised copies of their essays.
- **Timed Writings**
At least two timed-writing tests in each of the first three quarters, and more during fourth quarter. The goal is for students to continue to develop their own voice and commentary upon their ideas and data. An AP-style prompt is given, some with appropriate resources. Students must then develop a claim and use proper support to argue the claim. The first quarter's writings will be Rhetorical Analysis essay questions, the second quarter will focus on Synthesis essays, and we will concentrate on Argumentative Essays during third quarter. These timed writings will serve to assess the skills practiced in the practice essays and also to give students the opportunity to integrate feedback from peers and the instructor. These essays will be scored using the 9-point AP exam rubric.
- **Other Homework, In-Class Assignments, and Quizzes**
Including, but not limited to, reading exercises (such as annotating and/or answering questions), quizzes for reading checks, and Socratic Seminar entrance tickets and reflections.

In Class Participation – 10 %

- **Class Discussion**
 - Students are expected to contribute positively to the conversations in class. Excessive absences, disengagement from class, or outright disruption of the educational environment will result in lowered discussion grades
- **Revision Conferences**
 - One-on-one conferences with the instructor concerning students' timed writings and suggestions for improvements

Late Policy

- **Formative Assessments**
Late formative work can earn reduced credit at the instructor's discretion.
- **Summative Assessments**
Late summative work will be accepted until the second-to-last week of the semester, but students lose the ability to revise these assignments.

Revision Policy

- Summative assignments turned in on time can always be revised after a conference with the instructor. The new version of the work must be turned in with the original copy and any grading marks or notes.
- Students must schedule a conference appointment with the instructor in person or via e-mail.

Plagiarism/Cheating

The entire English department has agreed to the following policy for plagiarism or cheating:

- 1st Offense — Half credit on assignment, notification of principal and parents
- 2nd Offense — No credit on assignment, referral to principal, notification of parents
- 3rd Offense — No credit for course, referral to principal, meeting with parents

Course Outline:

Q1 — Understanding Rhetorical Analysis

This unit will begin students down the path of learning to read as writers. To assist students in recognizing and subsequently developing their own tone, diction, voice, and style, students will be learning about tropes and schemes. Students will first learn to identify these tropes and schemes, and then begin to imitate and incorporate them into their own writing. Special attention will be given to pronoun/antecedent agreement, modifiers, comma usage, transitions, and connotative diction in others' and their own writing to develop a personal style and voice. Students will also spend significant time working with the rhetorical triangle as well as Aristotle's means and modes in preparation for the approaching AP exam's rhetorical analysis question. Students will be learning the parts of the rhetorical triangle, as well as its parts' interconnectedness. Both understanding the rhetorical triangle, means and modes, and applying knowledge of it to new situations will be important.

This unit will also introduce students to detailed annotation and active reading, a skill that will be practiced throughout the year on every reading that we do. All students will read and discuss *Of Mice and Men*, relating it to an overall discussion of the relevance of the American Dream. Students will also choose and begin their first independent novel. Both novels will be assessed through in-class essay tests.

With such a focus placed upon students discovering their own values and beliefs and subsequently being able to explain how and where these ideas were created, students will be asked to write a personal reflective essay that teaches others about a value that is core to them. Students will be expected to apply their learning of the rhetorical triangle and the means and modes of persuasion into this personal essay.

Q2 — Research Skills and the Synthesis Essay

This unit focuses on preparing students for how to write strong paragraphs, correctly use sources, and prepare a solid synthesis essay. The major context vehicle for this unit will be viewing equity issues in American History. Topics may include Racial Equity, Gender Equity, Issues of Special Education, Issues of Age, etc. Students will be reading college-level articles addressing these equity issues both in the past and in the present. During this unit, significant focus will be placed on learning to read college level texts. The seminal text of this unit will be Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. As the novel reveals and discusses more issues than simply the low wages of many Americans, it serves as a jumping off point into a social equity research unit that culminates in students writing a synthesis-style essay dealing with some aspect of a equity. Research skills will be taught that include understanding and accounting for authorial bias, establishing an author's credibility, effective note-taking, incorporating direct and indirect quotes into an essay, and correctly using MLA citations both in the paper and on a works cited page. Students will also focus upon using the best evidence to state their claim while also accounting for any possible multiple interpretations the evidence might possess.

After researching various issues of equity in the United States, students will be asked to research an issue of particular relevance to them. Students will be expected to create a strong thesis, find appropriate research materials, and write a research paper presenting the problem, its history and causes, recent progress on the issue, and key individuals (past and/or present) associated with the issue.

Semester 1 Final:

Students will take a mini AP exam with 1 Rhetorical Analysis essay prompt and 1 Synthesis essay prompt drawn from a prior year's AP exam during the 90 minute block period.

Q3 — Learning how to Argue Effectively

Writing instruction in this unit will specifically focus on how to organize an argumentative essay that defends, refutes, or qualifies. The vehicle for this learning will be an in-depth study of issues with particular salience for students and a self-reflective look at students' own spoken beliefs and unspoken assumptions and warrants. To facilitate this self-awareness, Toulmin's Model will be taught. Writing instruction during this unit focuses upon reinforcing and refreshing the building blocks of good writing. Specifically, students will focus on creating dynamic and authentic theses accompanied by strong paragraphs that emphasize students' commentary of their ideas, rather than merely summarizing arguments or letting data speak for itself. Students will also practice the use of effective transitions between these paragraphs.

During this unit, students will return to American fiction to read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In part, the class will study Twain's use of rhetoric and satire to develop a social argument. We will also revisit Ethos as it pertains to the unreliable narrator. Students will choose and read a second independent novel. Assessments of these novels will be similar to those from first quarter.

Q4 — Preparation for the AP Test

Students' needs and areas the instructor deems require review will largely drive this unit. Additionally, significant focus will be given toward the timed aspect of the AP test, as students will be given multiple timed writing prompts for the test. Our final novel — *In Cold Blood* — will be read during this unit.

Semester 2 Final

Students will take a full AP constructed response exam with 1 Rhetorical Analysis essay prompt, 1 Synthesis essay prompt, and 1 Argumentative essay prompt drawn from a prior year's AP exam during consecutive class periods.

Possible Final Activity

Depending on the timing of the AP test, seniors' last day, and the final exam periods, students may be given the opportunity to debate the instructor on any topic of their choosing. Details TBA.

Ongoing Activities

In addition to regular timed and take-home essays and current-events discussions, students will learn and practice test-taking skills to help with performance on the ACT and the multiple-choice portion of the AP test.

Cell Phone and Electronics Policy: Absolutely no cell phones or electronic devices in this class. Our class will follow the new school-wide policy. Students may receive ONE warning per semester. After the warning, students will be asked to take their cell phone or electronic device to the office, where they may retrieve it at the end of the day.