

AP ENGLISH LANG

Everything you need to know for the AP Exam.

CramList.net

Test prep created for students, by students who've taken the exams and know what to do.

Structural devices, developmental and rhetorical strategies, tips, hints, and more.

The Exam: AP English Language & Composition

How hard is it? Depends.

How long did I study? 3 hours total

What I did to study: Took two practice tests, freaked out, looked over graded essays I had written that year, looked over class notes.

Was it worth it? Nope.

CRAMLIST

This is the kind of exam where you could get a 5 without studying, but I'd rather be safe than sorry.

What you need to do to get a...

- 5: Write decent essays, get 80% of the multiple choice correct.
- 4: Write fair essays, get 60% of the multiple choice correct.
- 3: Write crappy essays, get 50% of the multiple choice correct.

The Lowdown: Ok, so AP English has the reputation for being one of the hardest exams. When I was taking practice tests two nights before the exam, I thought it was going to be. I was so frustrated after missing 40% of the questions that I actually ripped by practice book in half--true story.

The test wasn't actually that bad at all.

- 45% of pretty easy multiple choice
- 55% essay writing on boring but pretty easy topics (1 argumentative, 1 analysis, 1 synthesis).

Taking practice tests a few days before just got me super-nervous. If you're reading this article with a few months before the exam, I would recommend taking as many practice tests as you can to prepare your mind "how to think." Princeton Review, Barrons, Peterson, and basically any other review book will work pretty well.

If you can't do that, no problem, because I didn't either, and I still got a 5.

Helpful Hints

- Know basic rhetorical devices/strategies (see "Concepts," next page)
- Know basic developmental devices
- Know basic structures (comparison-contrast, classical argument, illustration, extended definition, etc.)
- Don't bother with the review sections of the review books. Just focus on practice tests and the "how-to" sections.
- If you don't relax, you won't do well. RELAX!!!
- If you're a good English student/writer, you'll probably get a 4 or a 5 without studying.
- Check out http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/english_lang/samp.html?englang for past questions.
- Proofread your essays

continued...

Helpful Hints

For the Multiple Choice...

Don't hunch over. Relax. Sit comfortably and upright. Have an open mind and don't over-analyze. If you get tense, you'll never be able to think logically, and this test is about thinking logically. It's also all about **process of elimination**. Follow this process:

- (1) Relax & think happy thoughts.
- (2) Look at the intro info & any dates provided to gain context. Read the passage very carefully, but you can skip over catalogues of details if you want. Make sure you understand the question. Slap yourself if you lose concentration, because these passages are boring.
- (3) Read the question and make a quick prediction of what the answer might be. Then, read each answer (A). Think: Does this answer work? Keep going through all answers, crossing off those that are exaggerations, distractions, etc. The correct answer is the BEST one, and it should pop out pretty easily. Just don't overanalyze or overthink. Be receptive.

**If you can eliminate 2 answers, YOU HAVE TO GUESS.

For the Argument Essay...

- Most argument essays are based on a one-paragraph passage that may require an paragraph in your essay devoted just to explaining what the heck the author's saying. For some reason, the 2008 exam that I took was more like an SAT essay question. No passage.
- Whatever, just formulate *some* argument. It doesn't matter if it's morally wrong or just plain stupid. The test graders (people like your teacher) are just looking for a thesis, good support, and good writing.
- Support, attack, or qualify whatever statement you're given. Just pick a side and GO. Now, choose THREE main supporting arguments that bolster your argument. You'll have one (or more) paragraph(s) devoted to each support. That's about the only planning you need to do.
- Your first paragraph needs to be a short introduction. Summarize crap or analyze the passage if there is one.
- Your second paragraph should be your thesis statement. This is critical. You MUST have a thesis statement--a statement of your opinion--if you want to get a good grade.
- Each paragraph until the end should focus on a single support. You can devote two paragraphs to a single support if you want to. Don't go off on tangents.
- Follow this outline:
 - Introduction
 - Narration (explain what the issue is)
 - Your thesis
 - Confirmation (support of your thesis)

- Refutation (refute any possible counterarguments--this'll impress the readers)

- To make yourself seem more legitimate, you might want to include some concessions, i.e. admissions that some aspects of your argument can be challenged. This in turn makes your thesis and support (confirmation) more credible.
- Don't bother with a conclusion.

For the Synthesis Essay...

- All this is--and I mean ALL THIS IS--is an argument essay. The only difference is that you're provided documents that you can use to support your argument. It's pretty darn easy.
- You'll get a 15 minute planning period before you even start to write to read all the sources. You only need to use three, but I found that I ended up using nearly all.
- So... write it like an argument paper, but quote or refer to the sources a few times in each paragraph.
- Cite your sources. This is what I mean:
According to Joe Schmo, "blah blah blah" (Source 5).

For the Analysis Essay...

- This is always the hardest, but it doesn't have to be. If you have a good English teacher, you'll probably know what to do. If not, buy a review book and read how to write an analysis paper.
- You're given a passage, and you'll have to "explain how the author uses blah blah blah to blah blah blah." Translation: What is the author trying to do/tell me, and how does he do it? Your essay needs to answer this. Not too hard.
- You might have to do a comparison/contrast between two passages. I'd recommend explaining one passage in totality first, then explain the second passage and how it compares/contrasts with the first.
- Organize your essay's paragraphs/sections to discuss (1) The author's theme (2) The structure of the passage, and (3) Developmental devices.
- For developmental devices, write the following: "The author uses blah blah blah **to unify the passage and reinforce his theme.**" Gets 'em every time...
- DON'T OVERLOOK THE OBVIOUS!!!!
 - What is the author's tone?
 - How is the passage organized?
 - What does the language sound like? (If you talk about the "music of the language," you'll probably impress the grader)
 - What is the author talking about (writing this, then fleshing it out with a sappy explanation will get you bonus points).
- English teachers are wordy. So, if you make a claim, take the time to explain it in detail. Beef it up and flesh it out.
- If you have time, make your last paragraph talk about "a higher, more beautiful truth" that the author gets at. It will make your grader happy.

continued...

- If the passage is artsy-fartsy/expressive, I would suggest mentioning the “beauty of the author’s prose” or the “beautiful simplicity” of how the author describes something. This makes you look like you know what you’re talking about.
- Don’t bother with a conclusion.
- Definitely check out http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/english_lang/samp.html?englang for past questions, and definitely check out the scoring guidelines that College Board provides for each question.

Concepts

“What is the author telling me, and how does he do it?”
Don’t overlook the obvious--start at the literal!!

Structural/Organization Devices

in no particular order...

- comparison/contrast
- classical argument
 - introduction, narration, confirmation, refutation/concession
- classical essay (three-part structure)
 - intro, body, conclusion
- thesis & antithesis (a kind of comp/con)
- extended definition
- description/example
- extended analogy
- etc.

Developmental Devices

in no particular order...

- tone
- example giving
- sentence fragments
- repetition of key terms
- **parallelism**
- alliteration
- allusion
- comparison/contrast
- thesis/antithesis
- enwrapment
- polysyndeton (repetition of conjunctions, e.g. “He jumped **and** he flew **and** he screamed **and** he exploded.”)
- the “music of the prose”--how does the writing sound?
- cataloguing
- *italics* (kind of lame, but OK to use if you’re desperate)
- long sentences
- onomatopoeia
- similitude/metaphor
- hyperbole
- periodic sentence (lots of stuff comes before)
- classical paragraphs (topic sentence, support)
- imagery
- action words (e.g. “squeezed,” “skittered,” “blew”)

****Don’t try to memorize this list. It’s intended to jog your thoughts and inspire high-scoring analytical essays.**

Other stuff...

If you have one week left: Buy *Cracking the AP English Language & Composition Exam* book from Princeton Review and read through the section that tells you how to do the multiple choice. It’s pretty good. Read through the multiple choice sections of the practice tests, but don’t actually test yourself because it’ll only get you nervous.

Depending on how you are at essay writing, you may want to skim that section of the review book, too.

If you have a few days left: See above. Most importantly, get lots of sleep.

The night before: This is probably the best test to procrastinate for, so don’t sweat it. Look over your notes and graded essays for the year (teacher comments only). Don’t even think about using a review book--it’ll just get you nervous. Eat a good dinner and go to sleep EARLY.

Play with numbers: Basically, you can get 75% on the multiple choice and 6’s and 7’s (out of nine) on all the essays, and you’ll probably get a 5.

Recommended review books: *Cracking the AP English Language & Composition Exam*, Princeton Review. (Annoying title, but pretty good overall. Skim Parts II and III, and take the practice multiple choice tests. Don’t bother with Parts IV or V).

There you go. A year/semester’s-worth of English Language crammed into three pages.

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If you like what you saw here, we’d appreciate if you’d pay us something for it.
Thanks!



Written by Jeff, who took the 2008 Exam.

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