

Advanced Placement. Those two words strike terror into the hearts of many, leave them cowering behind their laptops and under their school desks. Year after year students sign up for these challenging classes, all learning the same basic material working towards the goal of the ever so important AP test at the end of the year, determining whether or not they get college credit for the semester(s) they slaved away learning the material. Along the way these brave souls face timed writes, papers, and assignments that make head to wall contact seem like fun.

Along with the innumerable students who wake up from nightmares, soaked in sweat at the thought of the AP test, there is a creation that is the test's partner that leaves many a brave soul cowering in the corner. Students are first exposed to it when they get graded on their timed writes, or in some cases, their papers that the teacher has assigned. This creation, that makes football players cry, that makes shy students scream in horror, that makes the smartest kids feel like they were hit with the "stupid stick" repeatedly is none other than the AP rubric. *collective gasp of horror from the audience*

The AP rubric at first seems to be an innocent and non-threatening scale designed for helping a student improve their writing. But it is instead a creation that throws everything you have learned about writing back into your face with a vengeance and then laughs evilly as you stare at your paper and see how well you did not do.

If you are one of the those students whose first paper graded by this dark and dangerous rubric scored above a five, I salute you and want to tell you I think you deserve a bouquet of your favorite flowers and a shout-out from Dan Bergstein. And I will also tell you that I want your mad writing skills.

Most students, however, receive a number around a 4. A 4! The AP rubric tells you that this means you do "superficial" analysis and have a weak or underdeveloped paper. For most this is the first time you have been scorned for your writing in a while. You are used to getting A's and B's on all of your papers, even when procrastinating. (AP students, at least the ones I know, are also Advanced Procrastinators) It hurts and you bleed from the metaphoric wounds that this harsh new rubric has dealt. And the rubric itself seems mean and sometimes hard to understand. That is why I am going to share with you my interpretation of this rubric.

9- We bow down to you and your greatness. You deserve parades in your honor for you are a beast (a writing one anyway). You somehow managed to understand what we wanted from the vague and sometimes convoluted prompt.

8- We kneel before your greatness. But despite the fact you managed to understand what we were asking and did a really good job understanding it we feel it could have been more epic. Better luck next time.

7- You deserve a high five for that. You did a good job analyzing what we asked and achieved all the goals. You are so close to reaching the big kids table but you just need a bit more practice before burning your metaphoric bib.

6- We give you our nod of approval. You are better than average and you made a valiant attempt. We suggest you practice explaining without being redundant or oversimplifying your ideas. You are close enough to taste sweet success but there is definite room to improve.

5- You are half way there! You are way better than all the others below you but you fall mid-scale because we expect perfection. Develop a better thesis and go deeper into your analysis and you'll be a 7 in no time. If you were in a regular level class this would most likely be a B.

4- You tried. We just don't give out A's for effort. You are on the high side of the low scores. You covered everything just not all that well. Read the higher scoring papers and compare them to yours. Find out what you have trouble doing and next time try to add more of it.

3- One down from level 4

2- You tried, you mentioned the prompt, but you fell flat on your face. Don't worry, chances are you won't get any farther down on the scale. Dust yourself off, try not to let our harsh criticisms on the fact you failed get you down and try again. Improvement almost guaranteed.

1-Good job! You found the prompt and used evidence from the text! Now try to make your paper apply more and make more sense. It's only up from here!

-Wow...that had nothing to do with anything. Epic fail.

With this in mind I offer my fellow AP students and future ones this advice:

1. Oversimplification=death
2. Summary=death
3. Writing something that doesn't even apply=death
4. The AP rubric is a jerk. It takes good writing and says it is a failure because it wants knock your socks off and blow my mind great writing. From everyone.
5. Don't give up just because you got a low score. Chances are you will come back and teach that rubric who is boss.
6. Just because you aren't getting 8's and 9's or even 7's does not mean you are a bad writer. It just means you have to change your style some and focus on what is being asked of you.
7. Without failure success would be boring. Without getting something lower than a 5 that 7 wouldn't look so dang awesome.

I salute you fellow students and wish you luck in your classes. I believe in you! May my rubric help guide you through the turbulence which is in the world of the AP student.

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