

# AP English Language & Composition (2017-18)

## Course Overview:

"The AP English Language and Composition course is designed to help students become skilled readers of prose written in a variety of rhetorical contexts and to become skilled writers who compose for a variety of purposes." We will use primarily nonfiction texts to accomplish these goals, examining their rhetorical strategies and use of language. Students will read and write with the purpose of examining and creating strategies that elevate their writing style and their ability to respond to the rhetorical and analytical styles of other writers.

According to the College Board, "students choosing AP English Language and Composition should be interested in studying and writing various kinds of analytic or persuasive essays on non-literary topics."

"The goals of an AP English Language and Composition course are diverse because the college composition course is one of the most varied in the curriculum. The college course provides students with opportunities to write about a variety of subjects and to demonstrate an awareness of audience and purpose. But the overarching objective in most first-year writing courses is to enable students to write effectively and confidently in their college courses across the curriculum and in their professional and personal lives." Though reading is a very, very important aspect of the curriculum, writing will be the main focus. Students will be asked to respond to mature prompts in creative ways. "[T]he purpose of the AP English Language and Composition course is to enable students to read complex texts with understanding and to write prose of sufficient richness and complexity to communicate effectively with mature readers."

## Books:

DiYanni, Robert, editor. *One Hundred Great Essays*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Pearson, 2008.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003.

Robinson, Marilynne. *Housekeeping*. Picador, 1980.

Roskelly, Hephzibah and David A. Jolliffe. *Everyday Use: Rhetoric at Work in Reading and Writing*. Pearson, 2009.

(On including fictional works: "When students read, they should become aware of how stylistic effects are achieved by writers' linguistic choices. Since imaginative literature often highlights such stylistic decisions, fiction and poetry clearly can have a place in the AP English Language and Composition course. The main purpose of including such literature is to aid students in understanding rhetorical and linguistic choices, rather than to study literary conventions.")

Many other individual pieces and excerpts will be provided throughout the year.

## Standard of Excellence:

**Late work is not accepted in this class.** You receive college credit for this class and it is run as a college class would be. *If you do not turn an assignment in on time, you will not receive credit for that assignment.* If there are extenuating circumstances, you can communicate with Mr. Durham **PRIOR** to the due date and we can work out a revised due date. However, if that conversation does not happen *before* the due date, the deadline will stand.

One hour of your own work/study is required out of class per week. That hour can be broken up however you

want during the week (i.e. one uninterrupted hour, two days of 30-minute study, three days of 20-minute study, six days of 10-minute study, etc.). You will be asked to report what you did and what you learned. Each “week” runs from Monday morning until Sunday night. However, Monday and Tuesday serve as “flex” days that you can use to finish your hour for the previous week if needed. Each week you will need to report your hour by Tuesday night on a Google form to receive credit. Get in the habit of reporting as soon as possible each week (Sunday night, preferably). If you miss reporting it, you can report it on Wednesday or Thursday for half credit. On Friday each week, I clear the Google form so that people can begin reporting the next week’s hour. This hour of work each week is essential to helping you identify what you need to improve, as well as helping you actually improve. Make your hour study consistent and meaningful as you prep for the AP test. If you know that a particular week will be so busy that you may not be able to complete your one hour, communicate with Mr. Durham **PRIOR** to that week’s due date to discuss making up the hour in a future week. If you do not contact Mr. Durham before that week’s due date, you cannot make up that hour for points.

**Though I cannot require everyday attendance, if you know you will miss class a lot, this is not the class for you.** If you are habitually tardy or absent, I will email home. You will be doing a lot of work on your own, but the class discussions, notes, and lectures are also vital to your success.

Consistent study will help you balance your load and learn more effectively. Set a goal with yourself to complete assignments early, before due dates, and your life and education will be simplified and profitable.

## **Course Organization:**

### **First Semester:**

Our first semester will focus on developing definitions of rhetoric, tone, style, etc. Assignments will be given to help the students improve their writing style.

We will begin our semester-long “love affair” with vocabulary – both English-related terms and other vocabulary words that will help you in answering questions on the AP test. Every few weeks you will be expected to learn 20 vocabulary words (10 English-related terms and 10 other vocabulary words to help build your knowledge). Every time we take a quiz, if you miss it, it must be made up **within TWO WEEKS** or you cannot make it up. Vocabulary quizzes *cannot* be retaken.

We will work our way through our class text, *Everyday Use*. It will be an invaluable resource as you try to improve your understanding of rhetoric, both in your own writing and in other’s works. Our usual practice will be students reading a chapter at home and completing an assignment. Then, we will discuss the chapter as a class, complete another assignment, and then read a nonfiction piece which illustrates concepts from that chapter. *Everyday Use* also features a chance for us to look at some visuals as texts. We will look at various advertisements and discuss how they too communicate with their audience in an effort to achieve their purpose.

The students will read *A Narrative on the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. Here we will continually discuss Douglass’ rhetorical strategies, as well as review old AP Test essay questions concerning the text. The goal is that by analyzing rhetorical strategies in a longer work, the skill of finding those strategies in shorter, more dense works will be easier.

## Second Semester:

Our focus will be narrowed to the AP Test itself. We will be doing more practice tests and more timed essays, but still relying on the writing skills you have built through one semester. As the essay gets closer, we will go through many of the old free response questions, both writing essays and just talking through them.

We will also look at movie posters to further explore the idea of visuals as texts. Posters are created to sell a movie – how do they attempt to teach an audience about the movie using pictures, words, and colors. It will be fun and fascinating to approach such a ubiquitous medium and look at it with a critical and rhetorical eye.

**IN FEBRUARY, WE WILL HAVE A FULL PRACTICE AP TEST that will be a part of your grade. Please prepare for that test as if it were the AP test. It will help you see where you are and focus your study for the following two to three months.**

During fourth term, we will read *Housekeeping*, by Marilynne Robinson. Our focus while reading the novel will be on Robinson's use of figurative language and an analysis of her style. The students will keep a reading journal that will help in the completion of a future writing assignment.

## Writing Assignments for the Year:

We will do writing in a class "journal," as it helps you to understand your own voice and work out some of your writing skills and some things you need to improve. Journals will usually consist of reading a nonfiction piece, often an essay, and responding in some way. Sometimes you will be asked to give a rebuttal. Other times you will be asked to determine the strengths and weaknesses of an argument. Other times you may simply be asked to respond to the piece. Journal entries are important supplementary assignments; completing journal entries well and on time is an important step on your learning path. At the end of each term you will self-report your journal score. It is imperative that you complete all of the parts of each journal and put sufficient effort into them so that you can honestly report a high score. **Journals are a part of the participation category in Skyward and will significantly impact your grade at the end of each term.**

We will do timed essays as a class every few weeks. These essays will serve to help you get used to writing with a time limit and will only be graded a few times. The majority of the time you will look at a fellow student's timed essay and help them to see the strengths and the weaknesses. This peer editing is a help for both parties. As you look at other's writing, you will identify some of your own strengths and weaknesses as well. You will discuss the successes and failures with each other and we will talk about them as a class. Writing timed essays is also an effective use of your one hour study each week.

**NaNoWriMo in March:** November is National Novel Writing Month. Though novel writing is not necessarily within the scope of this class, we are going to harness the spirit of NaNoWriMo into a writing-intensive month of March. Most class days in March (and a few in April) will be dedicated to a timed essay session and then work on scoring them and evaluating your own writing. The hope is that, following your practice test in February, you will be intimately familiar with each of the three AP essay questions (synthesis, argument, analysis), as well as what you need to do personally to excel at each one.

All of the essays *below* should go through revisions. The effort you put into making your essays better through each draft will help you to more intuitively understand editing in the future. The hopeful result is that when you take the AP Test, wonderful, insightful writing will now be second nature. Though your writing is already very sophisticated if you are taking this class, I will be able to help with various rhetorical strategies (sentence structure, transitions, organization, general and specific details, tone, voice, and so on).

**All essays are expected to be in MLA format**, which we will review at the beginning of the first term and continue to reference throughout the year. In college, in almost every English class they will expect you to be savvy in MLA format and, as all of your essays will be in that format, you should become quite proficient.

#### **Analytical:**

Students will write **two** analytical essays.

TERM 1 - In the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* analysis, students are asked to analyze the rhetorical devices of the author and how they work effectively. Douglass' rhetoric cannot be separated from the racial tensions associated with his narrative. Consider the depth and emotion he channels into his writing.

TERM 4 - 2003's Question #3, which asks the writer to compare and contrast John James Audubon's and Annie Dillard's distinct descriptions of birds in flight.

#### **Argumentative:**

TERM 2 - Students will read "Forgive My Guilt," a poem by Robert P. Tristram Coffin, and argue a position on the effect guilt has in our lives.

#### **Research and Synthesis:**

TERM 3 - In preparation for the synthesis essay question on the AP test, students will be required to write an essay in which students make an **argument** of their own based on their research. Though the prompts will be based on what we decide as a class, they will need to have some significance and require you to gather information from many sources and then make your own intelligent argument. Some of the possibilities to get you started thinking: Examining the impact of money on education, or synthesizing the many ideas on television and how much it helps and hurts young children. There are myriad possibilities for you to write about. As we discuss prompts and topics as a class, try to zero in on something that you are excited about and that you could dig up ample research on. This essay will require your writing and analytical skills. (Your synthesis prompt **NEEDS TO BE AN ARGUMENT**, preferably a similar style argument question to the questions that are on the test itself. For example, "After examining several articles of the subject, what are the most important factors in education and how can education in America be saved?" or "How should TV be handled in homes with young children? Is there a set amount of time they should watch it? Or should TV be avoided all together until children are a certain age? Why?" or "With the ubiquitous presence of fast food in our nation, take a stand on what can be done. Should fast food be regulated in our society? What would such a system even look like? Or perhaps the government should do more in the way of encouraging healthy eating? Maybe you think nothing should be done. Find various articles and take a position on how to approach the epidemic of unhealthy eating in the US.")