

AP English Language & Composition

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:

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

DiYanni, Robert, ed. *One Hundred Great Essays*. 3rd ed. New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2008. Print.

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

Robinson, Marilynne. *Housekeeping*. New York: Picador, 1980. Print.

(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 as well.

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 important vocabulary words that will help you in answering questions on the AP test.

Each week you will be expected to learn 20 vocabulary words (10 English-related terms and 10 other vocabulary words to help build your knowledge.)

Within the first two weeks, students will also take an old version of the multiple choice section of the AP Test. This gives students an idea of what the test looks like and, when we take this same multiple choice section again before the actual test, a score to compare to.

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.

During second 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 write an analytical essay on the text as well.

Some essays we will read:

“How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Gloria Anzaldúa

“I Want a Wife,” Judy Brady

“Learning to Read and Write,” Frederick Douglass

“Never Do That to a Book,” Anne Fadiman

“On the Pleasure of Hating,” William Hazlitt

“I Have a Dream,” Martin Luther King, Jr.

“A Bachelor’s Complaint,” Charles Lamb

“On Writing,” Joan Didion

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.

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 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.

Some essays we will read:

“Naps,” Barbara Holland

“Living Like Weasels,” Annie Dillard

“On Self-Respect,” Joan Didion

“Living with Music,” Ralph Ellison

“The Company Man,” Ellen Goodman

“Politics and the English Language” and “Shooting an Elephant,” George Orwell

“The Morals of the Prince,” Niccolo Machiavelli

“The Medium is the Metaphor,” Neil Postman

“Road Warrior,” Dave Barry

“Me Talk Pretty One Day,” David Sedaris

“The Necessary Enemy,” Katharine Anne Porter

“The Duke of Deception,” Gregory Wolff

“What Secrets Tell,” Luc Sante

“The Gettysburg Address,” Abraham Lincoln

Writing Assignments for the Year:

We will do journal writing, 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. Students will write in their journals every day.

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 by me every 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.

All of the essays below will go through many drafts and 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 I will not be able to look at all of your rough drafts, for most of your writing assignments, after your fellow students help you to edit them, I will look at the rough draft as well. 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.

Narrative:

Students will write an essay about a time they did something that they now feel ashamed of. Challenge yourself to think of a good example. The narrative is expected to narrate that event and then close with an explanation/exploration of how you learned from that event or decision. Was the event a part of a stage that you went through in your life? Are you still making similar mistakes? This will involve a bit of analysis at the conclusion of the essay. Examine your life and find the most compelling thing you can write about.

Expository:

After reading "Naps" by Barbara Holland, pick another subject or topic you feel strongly about to lobby for. By this I mean: pick an idea or subject and write a serious essay explaining its

positives. Preferably, your subject should be something innocuous that seems unimportant or “small.” Think hard about your topic and make sure that it is something that can be debated. (Examples: You may choose to write about how air conditioning is unneeded and include several legitimate reasons for it. You may choose to argue about the importance of wearing ties. Perhaps you feel ties are an essential part of the American business experience.) The difficult part of this assignment will be resisting the urge to be completely humorous. Study the tone of Holland’s essay and infuse your essay with that type of serious, disarming evidence that shows your focus.

Analytical:

Students will write **two** analytical essays responding to a fiction piece (*Housekeeping*) and a nonfiction piece (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*).

In the *Housekeeping* analysis, students will choose from five analytical prompts, deciding which they feel most strongly about or can write the most effective essay about. Prompts: (1) Some people have suggested that *Housekeeping* is a “feminist” novel. Write an essay in which you analyze the ways that Marilynne Robinson addresses and characterizes the female experience; (2) Think of the house they live in in the novel. What does it mean to various characters? What might it represent as a symbol? Write an essay analyzing the symbolic role of the house; (3) Many reviews and essays about *Housekeeping* have focused on the intricate, intimate ways that Marilynne Robinson uses language. Write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies and figurative language that Robinson uses and discuss their purposes and effectiveness; (4) Though *Housekeeping* is an apt title for the novel, it is not immediately obvious why Marilynne Robinson chose it. Write an essay in which you analyze multiple ways that the title figuratively/symbolically or literally represents various themes of the novel; (5) The lake in Fingerbone is a strong symbolic presence in the novel. Write an essay in which you analyze the symbolic meaning(s) of the lake.

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.

Research and Synthesis:

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 race relations in America, taking a big political or social issue (health care, the 2012 Presidential race, the recession) and examining it from all angles before synthesizing your own opinion, 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.

Argumentative:

Write an essay in response to the following prompt from the 2001 AP Exam.

http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/ap/students/english/eng_lang_frq_01.pdf

(Question #3)

After writing two drafts, read Ron Sudol's response to the essays he read dealing with this topic (<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/features/8495.html>). Take his advice and rewrite your essay again, addressing his concerns. With your final draft, turn in a one to two page response on how your essay changed following Mr. Sudol's advice. Also, what did you learn about your own writing from the rough draft to the final draft?

Grading Guidelines:

100-94% = A

93-90% = A-

89-87% = B+

86-83% = B

82-80% = B-

79-77% = C+

76-73% = C

72-70% = C-

69-67% = D+

66-63% = D

62-60% = D-

59-0% = F

Late Work:

Late work is not accepted in this class. You receive college credit for the AP test and the class 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.*

Dress Code

The dress code is located on the school website. Students are expected to follow it or they will be sent to the office and parents will be contacted.

Equal Opportunity/ADA Accommodations

It is the policy of the school district to provide and promote equal opportunity without discrimination because of race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age or disability. The district provides reasonable accommodations for the known disabilities of students in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Individuals needing special accommodations should notify the school administration.

Sexual Harassment

Federal law prohibits sexual harassment of any kind by students or employees of the school district. Violations should be reported. Following an investigation, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.

Sexual harassment is unwanted, unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature. This includes any act or comment of a sexual nature which makes another person feel uncomfortable, included in the following forms:

- Displaying gender offensive items, photos, poster, etc.
- Using inappropriate gestures, touching, or grabbing.
- Making sexual remarks, suggestions, or rumors.
- Making comments about a person's body.
- Pressure for unwanted sexual activity.

Print this bottom portion off and return to Mr. Durham for credit!

Signatures:

Student: I have read this disclosure document and understand all the rules and guidelines for Mr. Durham's class. I will adhere to the rules.

Parent or Guardian: I have read this disclosure document and understand all the rules and guidelines for Mr. Durham's class. I will do my best to help my child adhere to these rules.

Parent E-mail Address:
