

COURSE OVERVIEW FOR AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

“If you would be a writer you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot”
Stephen King

Congratulations on your decision to take AP English Language and Composition. This is a **college level course** that will require independence, initiative, and commitment. The workload will be challenging. Please remember that taking a college course your junior year in high school really means that you have bypassed the course content of both junior and senior high school English courses. Hopefully, you gave this serious consideration when you elected to take an AP course. The reward for your efforts will be the empowerment that comes from finely honed communication skills, greatly enhanced chances of college success, and the possibility of college credit and/or higher placement in college composition courses. Although taking the Advanced Placement Examination in May is not a condition of enrolling in this class, doing so is encouraged for everyone and is required for those students seeking college credit. This class has as one of its goals to help you prepare for that examination.

The College Board establishes the standards for AP Language and Composition. They expect that the syllabus and the writing assignments will align with what is done in beginning composition classes in colleges and universities throughout the country. One of the expectations is that nonfiction will be at the heart of the course. Expect to be engaged in careful reading of nonfiction texts, close analysis of the ways writers use the resources of language to achieve their purposes, sustained inquiry, and in an ongoing investigation of issues and ideas. While our focus will be on language and the way language works, you will find that your studies in this class and your studies in AP United States History will be mutually supportive. Fiction will receive a lesser emphasis than in your past English courses. The AP exam in May will test your ability to perceive the way writers are using language, your ability to read analytically, and your ability to write clear, well-supported arguments on a variety of issues.

Reading critically will be a major factor in your success. Reading skills you will be expected to demonstrate include:

- Getting facts straight
- Identifying stated and unstated assumptions
- Analyzing an author’s argument (and realizing that argument is about much more than winning or losing; it is much more than debate)
- Examining an author’s reasoning and evidence
- Identifying the basic features of style
- Identifying structure and patterns of development
- Analyzing an author’s use of language in order to identify the author’s attitude, biases, purpose, and intended effect
- Understanding the relationships between the author, the subject, the intended audience, the rhetorical situation and the language choices the writer makes
- Exploring your personal response and those aspects of the text that evoke that response
- Evaluating a text overall and determining its significance: Is the text important? To whom? Why does it matter? What are the limitations of the text? What does the author fail to see, include or understand?
- Exploring the connections you find between and among texts

Writing Skills

An equally important aim of this course is to help you develop your abilities as a writer. You will write frequently in response to a variety of formal and informal tasks. In general, you can expect to produce at least one formal paper per marking period. You will work hard to produce writing that is characterized by:

- A wide ranging vocabulary, chosen for its precision and for its appropriateness for both the audience and the task
- Logical organization enhanced to increase coherence (transitions, repetition, and parallelism)
- An effective balance of assertions and support
- Overall mastery of grammar, usage, spelling and punctuation
- A variety of sentence structures including effective use of subordination and coordination, periodic and loose sentence structures and an understanding of how these can be used to create rhythm, balance and emphasis
- Attribution of sources using Modern Language Association conventions
- Focus, clarity and substance, even under timed conditions

Oral Communication, Library, Research, and Time Management Skills

- A demonstration of library and internet research skills
- Participation in seminar, large and small group discussions
- Delivery of polished oral presentations with appropriate technological support
- The ability to manage time effectively: to handle short and longer term assignments simultaneously, and to meet assignment and project deadlines

Participation and Positive Leadership

Participation is expected of all class members. Participation involves:

- sharing ideas
- asking thoughtful questions of both your peers and your instructor
- listening carefully
- providing support for your classmates and generally taking personal responsibility for helping to create, a healthy, dynamic learning environment.

Textbooks and Classroom Supplies

Your textbook rental and student fees are to defray the cost of the following materials available for your use this year:

- *The Language of Composition: Reading, Writing, Rhetoric* (Renee H Shea, Lawrence Scanlon and Robin Dissin Aufses)
- Various paperback titles
- A wide variety of nonfiction readings duplicated for class use
- Markers, chart paper, transparencies, printer paper and other classroom supplies

Other Supplies

For your personal use you should have the following:

- A three ring notebook or accordion file for organizing work in progress, information handouts, assignment sheets, scoring guides, notes, research, and prewriting.
- A folder in which you maintain a portfolio of your completed writing assignments—accompanied by at least one previous draft, peer reviews, instructor comments and your personal reflections.

I am looking forward to getting to know each one of you individually. I am committed to working with each of you to help you reach your goals and, hopefully, to create some cherished memories for all of us along the way.

Please take this course overview home and share it with your parents. I am including my e-mail address should they have questions.

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