

Format and Scoring of a Recent AP Language and Composition Exam

Format

Section I: Multiple-choice questions (approximately 55)	60 minutes
Section II: Free-response sections (3 essays)	135 minutes
Total time	195 minutes

Scoring

1. In the multiple-choice section, you earn 1 point for each correct answer. To eliminate random guessing, 0.25 point is deducted from the total for each wrong answer. Unanswered questions do not count for or against your score. The multiple-choice section equals 45% of the total exam score.
2. The three essays are each scored holistically; the scores range from 1 to 9 (or 0 for a blank paper or one that does not attempt to answer the question). These scores are then calculated to equal 55% of the total exam score. You can read more detailed information on the scoring of the essays in the “Introduction to the Essay Section,” later in this book.
3. The multiple-choice section score is added to the free-response section score to produce a composite (or total) score. Finally, this composite is translated into a 5-point scale that is reported in July to you, your secondary school, and any college designated by you.
4. AP final scores are reported as follows:
 - 5 = extremely well qualified
 - 4 = well qualified
 - 3 = qualified
 - 2 = possibly qualified
 - 1 = no recommendation

General Description

The AP English Language and Composition Exam is used by colleges to assess your ability to perform college-level work. Actual college credit (either for one semester or for an entire year) may be offered by colleges and universities. The test lasts 3 hours and 15 minutes and consists of two major sections. The multiple-choice section includes approximately 55 questions that address four reading passages. All the questions in this section have equal value. The second portion of the test is called the free-response section. You are given three essay topics, and you must write an essay on each of the three topics in 2 hours and 15 minutes. The suggested time allotment for each essay is 40 minutes, and an extra 15 minutes is added for reading the essay prompts. Each of the essays is of equal value in your final score.

The multiple-choice questions are designed to test your ability in analyzing prose passages. These passages are drawn from a variety of sources, rhetorical modes, historical or literary periods, and disciplines. You will be asked questions about the passages’ style, content, and rhetoric. Expect four reading passages with between 12 and 15 questions per passage. However, do not be surprised if you receive five reading passages, which occasionally happens. If this is the case, the number of questions for each passage will be reduced accordingly. The multiple-choice questions are carefully written and screened by the AP Test Development Committee and the Educational Testing Service (ETS). The committee is ethnically and geographically balanced, and its members represent public and private high schools, as well as colleges and universities. The committee is responsible for choosing the passages for both the multiple-choice section and the essay portion of the exam. All of the multiple-choice questions are pretested in college classes before they are used on AP examinations.

The essays test your writing ability in a variety of modes and for a variety of purposes. These timed essays measure your expository and analytical writing skills, skills that are essential to success in many college exams. In general, expect that the three different essays will give you an opportunity to demonstrate that you can do the following:

1. Analyze how an author's rhetoric and style create meaning, based on one given reading passage.
2. Analyze an author's key point(s) in a given passage and create an argument essay that discusses the validity of the author's message.
3. Synthesize an argument of your own, based on multiple given passages, all dealing with similar subject matter.

The essay examinations are read and scored during a 7-day period in early June. In 2000, more than 300 readers representing the United States, Canada, and other foreign countries read more than 115,000 AP English Language exams; by 2005, more than 700 readers scored essays from 240,000 test-takers. More than half of the AP readers are college or university instructors; less than half are high school teachers. Each reader is assigned to score only one essay question during the reading session; therefore, each student's work is read by at least three different readers. Some essays are read and chosen as samples to be examined by all the readers, while others are checked by the table leaders and question leaders after an individual reader has scored the essay. You can trust that the essay scoring is as professional and accurate as possible. All readers are thoroughly trained and retrained throughout the week of scoring.

Each essay is scored on a scale from 0 to 9. After reading a large number of randomly selected essays, a committee creates a scoring guide that differentiates between the numerical scores for each of the three essay questions. Therefore, the scoring guide is based on the students' *actual performance* in writing the essays, not how the question writers *anticipate* they should perform.

Overall, the entire exam is designed to show student awareness of how an author creates meaning through language use, genre conventions, and rhetorical choices. A qualifying score demonstrates your ability to perform college-level work.

Questions Commonly Asked About the AP English Exams

Q. Who administers the test?

A. The Advanced Placement exams are sponsored by the College Board. The test is administered through the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

Q. What materials may I bring to the test?

A. Bring your identification card, as well as plenty of pens for the essays and pencils for the multiple-choice questions. You may not bring a dictionary, a thesaurus, or any other reference book.

Q. May I cancel my score following the exam?

A. Yes. You always have this option. Check the current AP Bulletin for procedures and deadlines.

Q. Is there a penalty for a wrong answer?

A. Yes. To discourage random guessing, 0.25 point is deducted for each wrong answer. You should make only educated guesses.

Q. How can I prepare?

A. Practice! Become comfortable with the test and its format. Take several practice exams to work on your timing. Learn new or unfamiliar terms that you might be expected to know for the exam. Practice your essay planning and timed writing. Practice paraphrasing what you read so that this skill becomes second nature before the exam.

Q. How do I register for an AP exam?

A. See your school counseling office for registration information. Most schools register candidates in March for the upcoming May AP exams.

Q. Is paper provided for the essays?

A. Yes. In fact, you'll write all of your essays in a special book that conceals your identity from the readers who score it.

Q. How many students take the AP English exams every year?

A. Each year, the number of students taking the test increases. In 2000, more than 115,000 students took the AP English Language and Composition Exam, while more than 189,000 took the AP English Literature and Composition Exam. By 2005, 240,000 students took the AP Language and Composition Exam, while 287,000 took the AP Literature and Composition Exam.

Q. Why are there two English exams?

A. Because not all colleges offer the same curriculum for freshman English. The two separate exams—AP English Language and Composition and AP English Literature and Composition—permit each college to designate the exam that best reflects its curriculum.

Q. What's the difference between the two English exams?

A. The two exams are similar; both test your ability to analyze the written word and to prove that you can communicate intelligent ideas on a given subject. However, the AP Language and Composition Exam asks more questions about nonfiction; there is no poetry on the language exam. The language exam also places more emphasis on rhetorical analysis and the study of *how* language works. Expect to write argumentative essays and rhetorical/style analysis essays, and synthesis essays that explore various authors' positions. In contrast, the literature exam places greater emphasis on literary analysis; it includes poetry, fiction, and drama. You should expect to analyze several poems on the literature test.

Q. Which exam should I take?

A. The best way to decide which exam to take is to ask the college that you plan to attend. A college may offer either one or two semesters of credit depending on its freshman English curriculum. Generally, a school that has a literary component combined with expository writing skills in its freshman English course gives up to a full year's course credit for the literature exam. Conversely, a school that has a full year of freshman writing in various rhetorical modes may give up to a full year's credit for the language exam. In addition, you must know your own strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes. If you enjoy prose reading and persuasive, analytical writing, then the language exam is for you. If you have a strong literary background, especially in American and British literature and poetic analysis, then the literature exam will be a better fit.

Q. Is one exam easier than the other?

A. They are equally rigorous.

Q. What is an average score?

A. To earn an average score of 3, you must answer approximately 50% to 60% of the questions correctly on the multiple-choice section and also write three adequate essays. At a typical test administration, two-thirds of all test-takers receive a score of 3 or higher.

Q. Can I take both the literature exam and the language exam in the same school year?

A. Yes, they are administered on different days.

Q. How can I find out how much college credit I'll get if I pass the test?

A. Contact the college and ask the admissions office for a clear, written response. Do not be surprised to find that this is a somewhat confusing issue, compounded by the fact that two English exams exist. Additionally, some colleges and universities consider an overall score of 3 as passing, while other colleges require a 4 or even a 5. Some colleges do require that all freshmen take their freshman English class, usually a composition course. In addition, some schools or programs within a college have different requirements.

Q. Do colleges get separate scores for my multiple-choice and essay sections? May I get the two separate scores?

A. No to both questions. Only your overall score, based on a scale of 1 to 5, will be released to you or to any college.

Q. What if my school does not offer an AP course or I did not enroll in the course? May I take the test anyway?

A. Sure! Although an AP course is theoretically designed to prepare students for the test, much of that "preparation" consists of reading quality literature—both fiction and nonfiction—and practicing analysis, critical thinking, and close reading in addition to taking practice AP exams and understanding the format of the exam. You can do this on your own, especially if you have disciplined study habits. However, I do strongly recommend that you read this test-preparation book carefully, and, if you can, also explore the College Board website (www.collegeboard.com/ap).

Q. When will I receive my AP exam scores?

A. You will receive your scores at about the same time as the colleges do, in early July.

Q. How can I obtain previous exams to use for practice?

A. You may order previously released exams directly from the College Board at the Advanced Placement Program, P.O. Box 6670, Princeton, NJ 08541-6670. You may also order materials online; the AP section of College Board information can be found at the College Board's online store at www.collegeboard.com/ap.

Q. How often are previous exams released to the public?

A. Multiple-choice exams are released every 5 years; essay topics are released every year.

Q. If I am not certain of the correct answer, should I guess on a multiple-choice question?

A. Don't be afraid to make an educated guess if you can eliminate at least two of the answer choices. Remember that you get no credit for a question you skip, but you do lose 0.25 point for a wrong answer. If a question seems really hard for you, or if you know from your pretesting practice that it is a question type that tends to stump you, let it go and skip it. Don't forget to leave that answer space blank on your answer sheet when you do fill in the next answer. You will find more information on guessing and eliminating answers in the "Introduction to the Multiple-Choice Section," later in this book.

Q. Can I still pass the test even if I don't finish all the multiple-choice questions in time?

A. Yes! Many students don't finish all the questions and still receive a passing score. Naturally, if you don't finish, you need to exhibit good accuracy on the questions you do complete and write three good essays. If you are running out of time, do not randomly fill in multiple-choice answers; the chances are you'll get too many wrong and lose 0.25 point for each wrong answer.

Q. Should I take the multiple-choice passages in the order they appear on the exam?

A. Many students choose to answer the multiple-choice passages in the order they appear on the exam, as it is a very systematic and logical approach. However, keep a steady pace and do not let one passage eat up too much of your time, subsequently causing you to slight your time on the last passage(s). Overall, remember that your score is determined by the total number of questions you answer correctly, minus 0.25 point for wrong answers.

Q. What score will I get for a right answer, a wrong answer, and no answer in the multiple-choice section?

A. For each correct response, you receive 1 point; a wrong answer deducts 0.25 point from your score; and an omitted answer earns 0. If you get every multiple-choice answer correct, the total score will equal 45% of 150, or 67.5 points. You will find more explanation on converting raw scores to scaled scores on page 8.

Q. Does the scoring give extra weight to one of the essays?

A. No, all three essays are counted equally. Because the essay portion of the test is 55% of your total score, each essay equals 18.3% of your essay score.

Q. Should I plan my essay in advance?

A. In general, yes, planning your essay in advance is a good strategy. An outline is never required and will never be seen by the readers anyway, but clear and logical organization is, indeed, an important criterion on which your essay is scored. You need to at least organize what points you intend to make and the order in which you plan to present them.

Q. How many paragraphs should I write for each essay?

A. As many paragraphs as you need to fully develop and present your ideas. Although the introduction-body-conclusion format is most frequently used, the number of body paragraphs presented varies from student to student and topic to topic. An introductory paragraph that contains a thesis is understandably an appropriate beginning, but don't worry if you don't get to the conclusion. Read more about essay organization and development in the "Introduction to the Essay Section," later in this book.

Q. How many pages should each essay be?

A. No set length is required; however, most high-scoring essays are at least 1½ pages long. Naturally, some essays are shorter and some are longer. Instead of worrying about length, concentrate on addressing all of the tasks of the topic and developing your ideas thoroughly. Be aware that very short essays, such as those that are only about half a page in length, are considered "unacceptably brief" and score very low; they simply do not demonstrate enough development of ideas to receive a passing score. You can read sample student essays in the "Introduction to the Essay Section," later in this book, and get a feel for length.

Q. How much should I worry about grammar and spelling?

A. Good news! You don't have to worry too much about your spelling. If you can spell reasonably well, no reader will dock your score. When you read any of the scoring guides for essays, you will notice that the word "spelling" is never mentioned. The readers are remarkably tolerant; they want to read your words. Grammar and punctuation can be another issue, though. The readers are always willing to overlook what they call "minor errors" or "honest mistakes" that are made under timed pressure. They understand that what you have produced is a first draft that is likely to have a few flaws. However, if your errors are persistent and serious, the reader will have to lower your score. In fact, the scoring guide states that no essay that is particularly poorly written—one with errors so severe that they distract the reader's attention from the student's ideas—may receive a score higher than a 2.

Q. Should I write my essays in cursive or should I print?

A. You need to write as legibly as you can, so use whatever method is easiest to read. The readers want to be able to reward you for your essay; to do so, they have to read the words. Please don't forget to use a nice black or blue pen; avoid ones that bleed through paper, because you'll want to write on the back of the page.

Q. Do the essays need a title?

A. Not at all. It will never affect your score. I can guarantee that readers are bored by dull titles anyway. Why not just get started on the essay itself?

Q. May I be creative in my essay writing?

A. The number-one rule is that you must address the essay question; if you can do so in a creative fashion, you may be rewarded, as long as it works well. However, writing something as far-fetched as a poem or short story would be unacceptable. Again, when you read some sample scoring guides, you'll notice that creativity is never mentioned as a specific criterion for scoring. The basic tenets are that your essay must be focused on the topic, organized, and well developed. Accomplish all of that in a creative style with a strong voice and the reader may be pleasantly surprised. I've read essays with a creative approach that received a 9 because they covered all the necessary points and presented ideas in such a refreshing style.

Q. How much of the essay passage should I quote?

A. No set, formulaic answer exists. Yes, you do need to refer to the passage appropriately in order to support your ideas, and many of those examples should take the form of quotations. However, a string of irrelevant quotations, glued together with a few of your own words will not help your score at all. Read the many sample essays in this text to get a feel for what's appropriate.

Q. Can I pass the test if I don't finish an essay?

A. Of course! Understandably, a radically unfinished essay will receive a very low score, so try to pace yourself accordingly, devoting approximately 40 minutes to each essay. Doing so should allow you time to finish each essay. Also, practice your pacing many times before the test. I also advise practicing the planning period over and over. If, within approximately 10 to 12 minutes, you can organize what you're going to say and the order in which you're going to present it, you should have enough time to actually write the words and sentences. Finally, if you find yourself in a time crunch on the day of the test, remember that body paragraphs are much more important than concluding paragraphs—especially conclusions that merely summarize. You should devote your time to getting your ideas down on paper. The readers' constant motto is: "Reward the writers for what they do well."

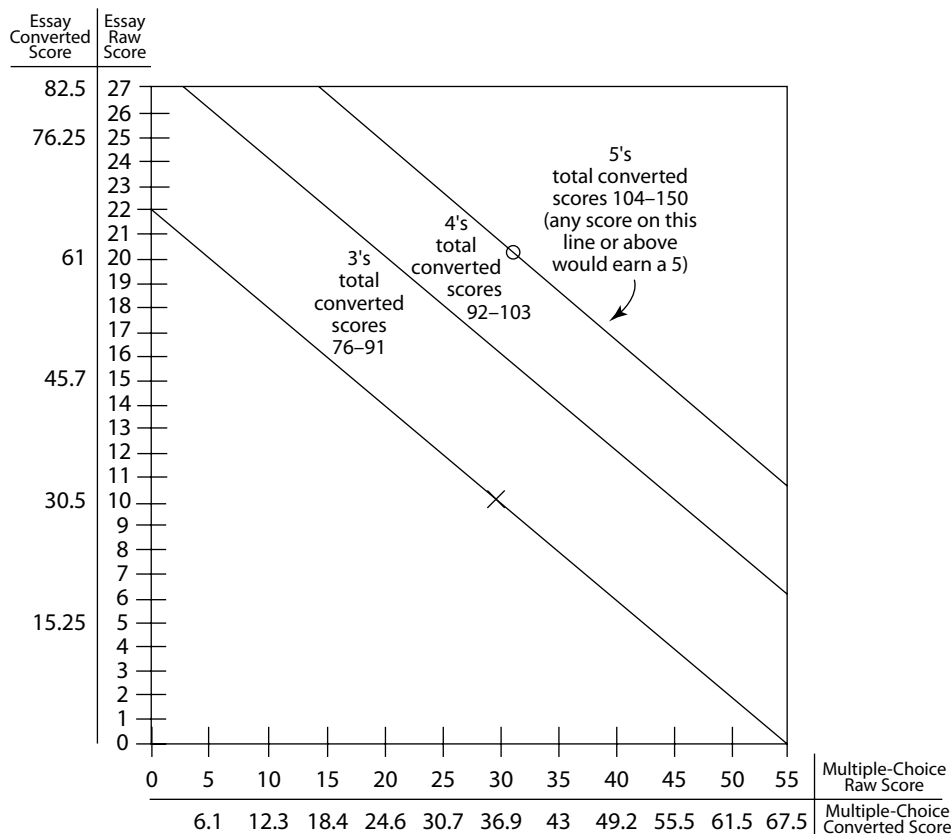
Q. Can you tell me how to approximate my score from my practice tests into an AP scaled score of 1 through 5?

A. Approximating your score is a bit more complicated than merely counting your numbers right and numbers wrong, but follow these directions and use the chart that follows. Additionally, you will find a sample scoring worksheet located in this text after each full-length sample exam (on the page before the answers and explanations).

The total score on the exam is 150. Because the essay and multiple-choice parts are weighted 55% to 45%, there are 82.5 points for the essays and 67.5 points for the multiple-choice questions. Because the three essays are graded on a 9-point scale, each point on your essay raw score will be multiplied by 3.0556. Three 9s would total 27, and 27×3.0556 would total 82.5. If there are 55 multiple-choice questions, each point in the raw score would be multiplied by 1.2272 to equal 67.5. Remember that the raw score in the multiple-choice section is determined by the number of correct answers minus 0.25 point for each wrong answer. A test with 30 right, 20 wrong, and 5 omitted would have a raw score of $30 - 5$, or 25. This raw score converts to a total of 30.68 (25×1.2272).

The total number of points required for a final score of 3, 4, or 5 varies each year, but a very reasonable assumption is approximately 104 to 150 for a score of 5, 92 to 103 for a score of 4, and 76 to 91 for a score of 3. The following chart gives you an idea of the combined scores you need on the essay and the multiple-choice sections in order to receive final scores of 3, 4, or 5. The chart assumes that there are 55 multiple-choice questions and 3 essay questions graded from 0 to 9.

If a student received 5s on all three essays, in order to receive a final score of 3, he or she would need a raw score (the number correct minus 0.25 times the number wrong) of at least 18 on the multiple-choice section. To receive a final score of 5, that student would need a raw score of at least 46 in the multiple-choice section.



Some Successful Testing Strategies

1. Increase your awareness of the test structure. Know how many questions you'll be asked, how much time you'll have, what basic skills you'll need, and so forth. Of course, these preliminaries are all covered in this book.
2. Understand the thought process behind the exam. If you understand what the test-makers have in mind when they write questions and answers, you'll avoid fighting the test, and your elimination of wrong answers will go faster.
3. Read the test directions carefully! Become familiar with the wording of the directions in advance so that you'll be as comfortable as possible on the day of your AP exam.
4. Mark your answer sheet carefully. If you skip an answer, mark it in your test book, and then carefully enter the next answer on your answer sheet.
5. Practice your pacing and timing skills. For multiple-choice questions, complete the easiest ones first; in essay writing, follow your preplanned strategy.
6. Overall, be prepared! Become familiar with the test. Remember that increased comfort builds confidence and relieves anxiety. These skills can all be improved by practicing frequently.

