

GENERAL ARGUMENT ESSAY REVIEW PACKET : A No-Nonsense Guide to Writing Your Response

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Remember, there is really not that much to this essay; it is deceptively simple. All you need to do is identify the original claim, state a clear position in response, back that position up with solid reasoning, and back the reasoning up with examples to prove each point. That’s really all it is—don’t make it harder than that! You can and should get creative with this essay within limits; everything should help to prove your point, but there isn’t really a formula or proscribed structure other than that.

That said, the following packet is a thorough list of *every* possible suggestion I can think of to offer you in preparing for the exam. As a result, it is lengthy. Skip the parts that you are certain you do not need to review—each one of you will have various areas in need of refreshing, and I have tried to cover all of the significant ones. I hope you find this helpful in getting ready for the exam. *Fast Track to a 5* also has a useful and user-friendly section on the general argument essay; I highly recommend reading it one last time before the exam.

Keep in mind that just about everything that applies to the general argument essay applies to the synthesis essay as well; in both cases, you are expected to make an argument and support it with reasoning and evidence. The only real difference is that the synthesis essay provides much of the evidence in the sources and requires you to do some analysis, whereas the argument is in no way analytical, except in that you need to analyze the validity of sources.

How To Make Your Final Preparations

1. Know what you are expected to do and know the expectations of the graders in general. Review the rubric beforehand. The most important thing is to make a clear and well-supported argument. Simple, right?
2. Read examples of 9s and 8s in this packet and at apcentral.collegeboard.com: this is probably the best preparation you can do.
3. Do one final practice essay, but don’t do anything the night before the test! It won’t help, trust me.
4. Don’t be intimidated by the test! You are well-prepared (ALL of you!) and have done well this year— confidence is important. I am absolutely confident that you all will do well, as you have throughout the months,

Dealing with the Prompt

The following is from the website of another AP teacher, J. Glass:

<http://www.uhseport.net/published/j/gl/jglass/collection/3/>

ANALYZING & ANSWERING AP LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION PROMPTS

Your task: to determine exactly what the test writers expect from your essay and then to meet their expectations using academic English and advanced-level syntax.

Your challenge: to perform this task in only 40 minutes per essay.

Below are some tips that should help you use your limited time efficiently.

ANALYZING THE PROMPT

STEP ONE: Underline key words and phrases in the prompt. Begin with verbs such as **identify, analyze, describe, compare and contrast defend, challenge, and qualify***.

***Usage note:** If you would like to qualify an author's claim, do **not** write "I qualify with this claim..." Qualify does not take the preposition "with." "I qualify so-and-so's claim that..." is also less than ideal.

How can you express that you would like to qualify the author's claim and still avoid the 1st person pronoun "I"? Write a thesis statement that specifies the extent to which you agree with the author and why.

STEP TWO: Paraphrase in your own words what you are expected to do. You can do so mentally and silently. Here is an example of this kind of internal paraphrase: "What I need to do is look for diction, rhetorical devices, and other literary techniques in this piece that help show how the author feels about Topic X. I have to be able to describe the tone and explain how certain rhetorical strategies create this tone."

STEP THREE: Where applicable, read the text you will be writing about carefully and with the prompt in mind. You may notice many interesting aspects of the text that will not help you respond effectively to the prompt. Do not focus your energy on them. For example, if the prompt asks you to focus on how an author uses rhetorical strategies to convey his/her attitude about Topic X, do not worry about creating a laundry list of every single scheme and trope in the passage used to discuss Topics Y and Z. Instead, focus on the aspects of form that contribute to the tone used to discuss Topic X.

ANSWERING THE PROMPT

TIP #1: Take the time to pre-write in whatever way works best for you. Yes, your middle school teachers probably made you go through painful and rigidly formulaic pre-writing activities, and these activities wasted your time. **But that does not mean that you should abandon pre-**

writing altogether. Many students at UHS tend to jump right into an essay, and admittedly, sometimes it works well, but all too often, these students, who have excellent ideas to share, lose track of the prompt and produce off-topic, rambling, repetitive, or unfocused essays with no clear thesis. **I've seen ample evidence this year to support the following claim: Students who *do* take the time to pre-write and who actually consult their notes/outlines/webs, etc., as they write, produce better organized essays that are clearer and more concise.**

The AP readers like clear and concise. Many 8's and 9's are short, but they are all well-organized, well-developed and unified by specific and sophisticated thesis statements. Repetitive and/or unfocused essays have a difficult time making it into the upper range of scores.

TIP #2: Do not write an “empty” introduction that sounds nice but does not say anything relevant to answering the prompt. More specifically, avoid simply repeating or rephrasing the prompt. In addition, avoid sentences like this one: “Since the beginning of time, orators and authors have expressed their opinions through the use of rhetorical strategies.” You don't have time to be vague, nor do you have time to outline the history of rhetoric; begin answering the prompt immediately.

TIP #3: Consider leaving the introduction until last. Many talented authors “write to understand” and discover what they are really trying to say while writing the body of an essay; if you are one of them, you might want to write the body paragraphs first.

TIP #4: Once you've begun writing, be sure to periodically check that you are staying on-prompt. If you have strayed, do whatever you need to do to re-focus your essay. **AP readers do not frown upon cross-outs, inserted sentences indicated by arrows, or similar evidence of editing.** In addition, they reward students for what they do well in terms of answering the prompt. Therefore, you are better served by getting back on track quickly than by writing an eloquent off-topic essay.

TIP #5: If you have to make a choice between a skimpy last body paragraph and a skimpy conclusion, choose the skimpy conclusion. It is more important to have fully developed your

body paragraph. Many upper-range essays have short conclusions; focus on the heart of your analysis.

TIP #6: Show off your command of academic English. While you should avoid wordiness, you should also demonstrate that you can write at the college level. Demonstrate to your readers that you have at your command an advanced vocabulary, a knowledge of how to use semi-colons, the ability to vary the beginnings of your sentences, and other marks of an advanced-level writer. Remember that the difference between a 6 and a 7 or an 8 and a 9 is often the sophistication of the prose. If at all possible, leave yourself a few minutes to proofread your essay for informal diction and errors in conventions and to make any necessary changes.

MORE ON PROMPTS AND THE EXAM FORMAT:

General Exam Format

	% of Grade	Number of Questions	Minutes Allotted
Multiple Choice : Section I	45	55 (approx.)	60
Essays: Section II	55	3	135 (includes 15 “added” minutes for reading the synthesis question materials)

What the Essay Prompts Look Like

The types of questions asked vary from year to year, but you will likely see...

- A. One question that asks you to take a stance on an issue
 1. very open-ended: you choose the issue
 2. more directed: defend, challenge, or qualify the claim of another author
- B. One question that involves rhetorical analysis of a prose passage
 1. focused on how writer conveys attitudes
 2. focused on how author makes the text persuasive
 3. focused on comparison/contrast
 - a. elements within a single text
 - b. two short texts on similar topics or by the same author

TIP: The endings of passages are important and warrant careful reading. Often the author resolves an inner conflict, summarizes his/her position on an issue, or otherwise reveals something important for your understanding of the passage as a whole in the final paragraph or sentence.

C. One synthesis question that asks you to support **your own argument** using short source “documents”

1. stating clearly your own, convincing thesis very important
2. sources will be 4 to 7 in number
 - a. at least one visual image
 - 1) photograph
 - 2) cartoon
 - 3) graph
 - 4) pie chart
3. need to cite and discuss at least three of the sources in your essay
 - a. MLA citation may not be necessary, but is helpful
4. possible relationships among the source texts
 - a. similar opinions
 - b. (diametrically) opposed stances
 - c. elaboration

Claim

- ✓ First off, you need to **identify the claim in the text to which you are to respond**. Usually, you will be given a short quote. Usually there is not more than a paragraph or two of text. Immediately identify and mark the claim of the author. **Keep the claim in mind as you complete the rest of the essay!**
- ✓ **Identify the author’s reasons for the claim**, if there is enough text to do so. This helps you to determine whether or not the reasons are valid, sound, and true. This in turn helps with concession, refutation, and the like.
- ✓ **Make a claim and stick to it throughout the writing**. This does not mean you cannot change your point of view over the course of writing and thinking, but your final claim should be clear and definitive.
- ✓ **Qualifying the claim should only be a last-resort approach**; don’t qualify the claim as a whole unless it’s absolutely necessary. Effective qualification is very difficult, and qualified arguments tend to sound wishy-washy and unsure at times.
- ✓ **Feel free to change your claim in the process of thinking about both sides of the argument**; however, make sure that your ultimate conclusion is clear and accurately-stated.
- ✓ **Address exceptions and limits to your claim**: if there are certain circumstances under which your claim *does not* apply, be sure to point them out, rather than ignore them. Also, be sure to explain why your claim is not invalid as a result of these circumstances.

- ✓ **Clarify the extent of your claim:** does your claim cover all time periods, religions, cultures, professions, etc.? Is it universal, or is does it depend on circumstances? Be clear about these factors; your reader will want to know!
- ✓ **State your claim clearly and in the active voice.** Avoid qualifying modifiers, but equally avoid overly general, excessively abstract, or inaccurate absolute terms and phrases.

Audience

- ✓ **Treat your audience as a group of intelligent, rational individuals with varying biases and beliefs on the topic at hand.** If you recognize various possible biases on the issues and address the consequences, you really can't go wrong. Any audience wants to be treated with dignity—avoid “talking down” to the audience and oversimplifying points.
- ✓ **Your ethos:** strive to come across as open-minded but assured of your views. You want to project the appearance of having considered all sides of the argument and weighed the specific merits and drawbacks of each. You also want to seem intelligent and well-informed, capable of choosing between the various perspectives in order to select the most appropriate side to any issue. You *do not* need to come across as especially brilliant, gifted with words, or the like. The success of your argument is more important than the appearance of overwhelming brilliance!

Time Considerations

- ✓ **Number of examples**
 - **Fewer can be better:** 2 or 3 well-chosen, well-developed, specific examples is often preferable to, and more efficient than, giving tons of examples that all prove the same thing but in less detail.
 - **BUT—Use enough examples to fully prove the point.**
 - **The best proof is often in the detail of the examples—don't trade anything for the development of your examples!** You may be faced with the need to dispense with the conclusion or risk under-developing an example. Realize that the graders know the time constraints. You will be rewarded more for supporting your argument well than you will be for merely meeting the supposed expectations of a conclusion. In short, examples and proof are more important.
 - **Use enough to suggest that the examples “cover all bases.”** Use examples that show all of the important and relevant aspects of your argument. If your claim has multiple parts or “prongs,” make sure you provide thorough evidence for each.
- ✓ **Prewriting:** Do it, certainly, but keep it quick and simple. Listing (“brainstorming”) tends to be effective. + (pro) and –(con) t-charts can also help to set you up to consider the other side in order to provide refutations and concessions.
- ✓ **Revising:** Yes, you will be under rather strict time constraints. That said, there is too much to be gained from re-reading and revising your essay to ignore it. You will often

see gaps and holes in your argument that you did not see the first time through—the graders will notice these holes, so go back and fill them in! Take time especially to add further *elaboration* of examples. Use the “so what?” and “depth-charging” strategies, especially.

Evidence

✓ Contextual considerations:

- ***To what extent or degree do your reasons and examples apply?*** Are there any circumstances in which your claims and support *do not* apply? If so, it is often very useful to acknowledge the potential shortcomings of your argument: doing so helps you to avoid coming across as biased against one point of view or another, or against a particular idea.
- ***Are your reasons and examples sufficient to prove that your claims are accurate*** regardless of place or time, or, if they are limited by place and time, have you explained the limitations clearly?
- ***Avoid taking on topics and ideas that you do not have the experience to speak well over:*** the graders know, of course, that you are a high school student. You probably won’t fool them with a fabricated expertise in open-heart surgery.
- ***Analogies and comparison/contrast are useful strategies for explaining ideas;*** make use of them! You can even get creative with metaphors, but make sure it is a fresh, clear, accurate metaphor that truly captures the spirit of the comparison.
- ***Cliches hurt your voice and your argument;*** stay away from them.

✓ Examples

- ***Scope:*** be sure to clarify for your reader the extent to which your examples hold true (see suggestions for “claim” above—all of the same suggestions apply to your use of examples.)
- ***Similarity of Examples:*** make sure all of your examples prove some aspect of your claim; sometimes this requires using similar examples, sometimes it requires using examples from a broad range of backgrounds; let your argument determine the degree to which your examples are similar.
- ***Accuracy of Examples:*** a critical error many students make is in using examples that don’t really prove the point they are trying to make. I believe this occurs as a result of a lack of focus on the prompt and “forgetting” the main claim and reasons for the claim. If you keep your own claim in mind and consider how well your examples prove that claim, you can avoid slipping up in this area.
- ***Avoiding Assumptions About Examples:*** be aware of your own biases and try your hardest to see things from the other side. This helps you to avoid assuming that the lessons of a certain example are self-evident, and helps to ensure that you say enough to really convince the audience of the accuracy and validity of the example.

- ✓ **Types of Examples:** your examples can come from just about anywhere, as long as they prove the point you are trying to make.
 - **Personal examples:** usually told as narratives or anecdotes. Be sure when using personal examples to show that the lesson of the example extends to your audience and not just to your particular situation.
 - **Historical examples:** often provide excellent support if explained fully and accurately. Make sure you know what you are talking about, though; most AP graders have an excellent grasp of history!
 - **Current events and topics:** again, very useful as a form of support. Make sure you know what you are talking about (it bears repeating!) If you are not well-versed in the details of the example, don't use it!
 - **Literature:** useful especially for exploring concepts and ideas. Be sure to show that the example also applies to "real-life," though; otherwise, the audience may say "but it's only a book..."
 - **Film and TV:** the same applies as with literature. Avoid pop culture unless it's highly relevant to the prompt.
 - **Comparison and contrast:** comparing and contrasting examples with your thesis/claim in mind often helps to clarify most of the contextual and scope issues for your reader.
 - **Analogies:** these offer the same benefits as comparison and contrast.
 - **Don't leave any loopholes in your examples or explanations;** this is one reason a t-chart is effective; it allows you to see potential gaps by understanding the views of the "other side" of the argument.

Organization

- ✓ **Review the Bruffee Patterns. Know them. Use them.**
 - Straw man and one reason, two reasons, concession, Nestorian Order
- ✓ **Think about your purpose; meaning dictates form.** The structure of your essay should help to contribute to the argument by providing logic and emphasis to the important facets of your argument.
- ✓ **Placement of paragraph breaks and transitional phrases**
 - **Topical and functional paragraphs**—review notes in the "Strategies" section of your Writer's Notebook; also available at my website. Make use of these for rhetorical emphasis and effect.
 - **Paragraphs should generally be arranged according to related ideas.** Examples will often need to be arranged in their own separate paragraphs, though this is not a hard-and-fast rule.
- ✓ **Sentence organization; vary lengths according to emphasis.** Remember that the end of a sentence is the position of most emphasis; use this to help you to emphasize your claims and important points.

Clarity and Conciseness

- ✓ **No wasted language, no wasted time, no wasted space—leave out anything that does not in some way contribute to the point that you are making.** Every word should somehow help to prove the point that you are making.
- ✓ **Avoid “fluff”**—graders can spot it from miles away.
- ✓ There is a fine but definite line between elaborating well in detail and amount and saying too little with too much; know where the balance lies and strive to attain it.

Voice

- ✓ **Avoid needlessly academic, over-written prose; clarity is more important than anything,** and style is easier and voice are much easier to achieve with a relative simplicity of language—this is not to say that you should write informally, just that you should keep your writing natural; avoid the temptation to try to write like a professor; it is transparent and destroys your credibility in the argument, which is a vital aspect of succeeding on this essay.
- ✓ **Write in the active voice;** take a minute or two to revise as needed (see your Writer’s Notebook “Strategies” section for tips on eliminating passive voice in favor of active voice.)
- ✓ **Sound sure of yourself.** Leave out phrases like “I think” or “I feel”—these usually impeded the confidence in the voice.
 - **Phrases to avoid:**
 - “I think”
 - “I feel”
 - “Probably”
 - “Sometimes”
 - “Maybe”
 - “I defend,” “I refute,” “I qualify,” and any variations of these phrases. These do not say anything to further your argument and constitute only wasted pencil movement and time. Leave them out in favor of phrases that actively state your point; “Camus’ ideas are misguided because he mistakes the underlying uncertainty of the future for meaninglessness,” for example.
- ✓ **Avoid vague, non-committal language;** make clear judgments with clear reasoning
- ✓ There is nothing wrong with first person when used *for a good reason* in the context of the argument.
- ✓ **Be sure to use accurate language to describe an author’s claim;** if you misrepresent an author’s idea, you are guilty of the strawman fallacy and your argument loses validity!
- ✓ **Don’t stick too close to the passage used in the prompt.** Concrete, specific, fully-elaborated examples are of primary importance to your argument—if you don’t **support** your ideas, they cannot stand up! Often, when students feel limited to

writing about the prompt passage directly leads to summary instead of argument, and this will earn you at best a 2.

- ✓ **Prove that your examples show what you suggest that they show and prove what you say they do.** This requires multiple “tiers” of evidence (see J. Glass attachment in this packet)
- ✓ Be careful to **layer your argument with these tiers** so that you have sufficient support and explanation for your ideas.
- ✓ Remember the “*so what?*”, “*what/how/why*” and “*depth-charging*” strategies? They all work for this essay, too (especially depth-charging!)
- ✓ Focus **on providing the details and specifics that help to prove your point**; saying more for the sake of saying more isn’t the point; the goal is to provide relevant context. In this, you can also use SOAPS from a writer’s perspective; when you explain an example, you can use the SOAPS acronym as various points to be explained for each example—this may help you remember to “flesh out” your examples sufficiently.
- ✓ **DO NOT write about anything you don’t know about.** A lack of knowledge is almost immediately obvious in essays—you won’t fool the graders, since they read thousands of these essays and are trained in looking for weak and fallacious arguments. Don’t put yourself in position for a weak or fallacious argument by speculating, avoiding directly dealing with the issues in the prompt,
- ✓ **There is no need to directly refer to the prompt in your response**; refer instead to the passage.
- ✓ **Your thesis may appear nearly anywhere in the essay**, as long as it makes sense for your purpose and is clear.

BELOW ARE TWO ARTICLES FROM AP CENTRAL THAT ARE WORTH THE TIME TO READ: THEY OFFER GOOD ADVICE FROM THE GRADERS *THEMSELVES!*

Shaping Argument: Lessons from 2003 Exam Samples

by Renee Shea, Bowie State University, Bowie, Maryland

Most of us who teach have encountered the paradox that students are ferocious when it comes to having opinions but less confident when trying to express them as written arguments. Many of them turn to the five-paragraph formula, stringing together a series of examples. What other options do they know that they have? To explore this topic, I studied a group of sample essays from the following 2003 argument question:

The Prompt: Free-Response Question 1, 2003 AP English Language and Composition Examination

In his 1998 book *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality*, Neal Gabler wrote the following:

One does not necessarily have to cluck in disapproval to admit that entertainment is all the things its detractors say it is: fun, effortless, sensational, mindless, formulaic, predictable, and subversive. In fact, one might argue that those are the very reasons so many people love it.

At the same time, it is not hard to see why cultural aristocrats in the nineteenth century and intellectuals in the twentieth hated entertainment and why they predicted, as one typical nineteenth century critic railed, that its eventual effect would be "to overturn all morality, to poison the springs of domestic happiness, to dissolve the ties of our social order, and to involve our country in ruin."

Write a thoughtful and carefully constructed essay in which you use specific evidence to defend, challenge, or qualify the assertion that entertainment has the capacity to "ruin" society.

I chose samples that received a score of 8, which, according to the scoring guide, "recognize the complexity of the claim that entertainment has the capacity to 'ruin' society and successfully establish and support their own position by using appropriate evidence to develop their argument." The "8" papers don't have the sophistication or fluency of the "9" papers, but they are excellent -- in many ways -- models of argument.*

Yes/No ... Then List Examples

Accumulation of evidence is by far the most common approach, a kind of reverse induction: the writer agrees or disagrees and cites examples to support that categorical position. Typical is the student who writes "Gabler's theory ... has been proven true by historical falls of empires, literature, and modern-day society." What follows are three rather lengthy paragraphs, each developed with an example on one of the specified topics: the fall of Rome, Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, and computer video games. It is a four-page essay with five paragraphs.

Another student challenges Gabler with this thesis: "...in most instances of 'risky' books, movies, and plays, entertainment ... has something to offer beyond the cover that most people are not willing to look for." The writer then develops an essay with a paragraph about Broadway plays, specifically *The Full Monty*; another on books, specifically *Huck Finn*; and another on movies, with reference to John Wayne westerns, *Psycho*, and *A Beautiful Mind*. Perhaps somewhat more subtle than the previous response, this one is also a five-paragraph essay driven by examples.

Of course, we tell students to support their arguments with examples, emphasizing that the most effective essays are concrete and specific, developed with relevant details. But the responses that follow this pattern are essentially one-point essays -- the same point, "I agree or I don't," supported by three different examples or types of examples to make that point. I often tell my students that this kind of essay strikes me as the verbal equivalent of raising one's voice: with each example, the volume goes up, yet the same point is repeated. Given the scores, however, it's clear that this approach can work well. It's a safe one, though the essays lack nuance.

Form and Substance

I noted three other patterns as I studied this pool of samples, though none as prevalent as the example-driven form: (Re)Definition, Consequence, and Yes ... But.... In each of these other approaches, the writers subordinate their supporting examples to subassertions or claims. The pattern then becomes agree/disagree, discuss a series of issues related to the stated claim, and support with examples or further explanation. It's worth noting that some of these are also five-paragraph essays, yet they are not as one-dimensional because the arguments are more layered.

The point that struck me as I read over these essays (all receiving the same score) is that the accumulation-of-evidence approach is not wholly ineffective; in fact, it's a clear method of organization, but it locks the writer into a static argument because the structural template seems to drive the thinking. The writers do "establish and support their own position by using appropriate evidence," often with considerable fluency, but the arguments are less developed than simply asserted, and then hammered away at. In the other three patterns, I found students "questioning the question," as the argument developed more of an organic life of its own that reflected several levels of critical analysis.

(Re)Definition

Most of the student writers assume that entertainment is a synonym for television and movies (probably because of the title of Gabler's book), but some recognize the importance of defining the term precisely, using that process to structure the essay. One such student asserts: "Though often controversial and viewed as 'mindless,' entertainment positively contributes to society and enriches rather than ruins our society." Neither assuming that we equate entertainment with violent films and mindless television nor accepting the binary opposition of entertainment and reality, he structures his essay by examining alternative definitions of entertainment as, first, education ("an especially potent educational tool due to its ability to combine fun and learning"). He discusses that point and includes -- but does not rely on -- examples, such as Sesame Street for younger children, as well as educational programs that dramatize historical events or classic literature, such as Hamlet or Great Expectations. The second point the student makes expands the definition of entertainment as a means to "express and communicate ideas and information ... [in order to] vastly increase and encourage cultural sensitivity and diversity." In a rather lengthy paragraph, he discusses music and even plotlines that cross cultural and geographical boundaries. The essay has only two developmental paragraphs, yet each includes several ideas discussed with considerable complexity.

Consequence

Some students choose to agree or disagree in terms of consequences, again subordinating examples to larger subissues. The prompt itself, with its reference to "eventual effect," suggests this approach; often these essays look beyond mere assertion that Gabler's statement is or is not true, focusing instead on defining the consequences of entertainment on society. One student considers entertainment as a cause that has certain negative effects: children watching television until they "forget what it requires to imagine," young women modeling themselves after film and television stars, young men seeing violence as the only answer to conflict, and an obesity epidemic plaguing all of society. There are some concrete examples in this response, but the writer argues persuasively by formulating and explaining four issues.

In the paragraph on young women, for example, the student examines the consequences of body images that require plastic surgery and harmful diets and the glorification of beauty over brains: "Since entertainment shapes society, females idolize those portrayed in entertainment and find themselves lacking in beauty. High school girls starve themselves, quest for plastic surgery... [and prefer] a superficial image of a model [to that of] a woman scientist." The paragraph is concrete because of the specific details explaining the consequences the writer is exploring, yet it is not structured around a series of examples.

Yes ... But....

Perhaps the most nuanced of the approaches, the "yes ... but...." technique (discussed in the "College Board's Building Success" workshop), addresses the counterargument as a way to craft an argument. In this way, the writer redefines the terms and explains points, using examples more to illustrate than to carry the argument. One student asserts, "It is important that people are able to separate entertainment from real life, spending ... time watching TV, but being able to recognize its limitations." Then she discusses ways in which people, especially adolescents, model themselves after pop stars, "fail[ing] to differentiate between what is real and what is not," before she makes the point that if people can learn to see the difference, then they can take advantage of television and movies that are uplifting or simply relaxing. The writer concludes by emphasizing the importance of educating today's youth on the "limitations and flaws" of entertainment so the next generation can understand it as a way "to help our society rather than hurt it." Thus, she has used the "yes ... but...." approach first to support and then to challenge the Gabler claim, not by fence-sitting but by exploring both sides to arrive at a conclusion or propose a solution.

Narrative

It is worth noting that I did not find any responses (in the 8s or the 9s) that presented an argument through narrative. I recall a few outstanding examples from previous years (a memorable one on the James Baldwin quote in 1995 about language as identity), but in this pool of samples I found narrative only when a student related a personal experience as part of the introduction or a developmental paragraph. Perhaps if students read such essays as George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant," W. E. B. DuBois's "Of the Passing of the First-Born," or Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue" less as memoir and more as argument, (though argument crafted through indirection), they might see more possibilities for structuring their own work.

Continuing the Conversation

Granted, the pool of essays I examined was relatively small, and the categories I have suggested are by no means the universe of possibilities. Nonetheless, I hope this beginning work will encourage others to continue the conversation. These samples offer valuable information about what students know and are comfortable doing with argument. We see that most rely on examples to structure their essays in a linear mode that makes the same point with several different examples: i.e., the examples become the argument. Other organizational structures suggest more complex thinking, as the writers break their main assertion or thesis into several subclaims that usually involve specific examples as part of a

discussion. These other structures also are more likely to acknowledge, possibly even refute, a counterargument. (The counterargument is likely to have a stronger presence in student writing after the 2004 question that directed students to address it.)

Yet it seems to me that the process I went through might be most valuable as a model for students themselves to discover how an argument can develop an organic life of its own and a form to go with it. Some of the categories I have described can be found in various textbooks along with other possibilities; the point is, finally, not to hand students a list of "types" of argument but to assist them in understanding how different approaches work. Students might use a pool of sample AP essays to go through a process similar to mine as they discern patterns of thought in written arguments. Or they might write to a sample AP prompt, exchange essays, and describe one another's arguments. As a class, then, the discussion could focus on similarities and differences in the ways students handled the question as they developed their own arguments. Are there predictable patterns? Is one approach more appropriate to the question than another? How might the possibilities seen in their classmates' work influence revisions of their own essays? Such discussions can surely lead students to take control of their own writing processes and, ultimately, write (for the AP Exam as well as in other contexts) more thoughtful and effective arguments.

* The samples were training papers used at the 2003 Reading and provided by ETS.

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The English Language Exam: Developing an Argument

by Ron Sudol

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Returning to Daytona

Last spring, I went to Daytona Beach for my seventeenth consecutive year as a Reader of the AP English Language and Composition Exam. I keep going back because the Reading provides a rare opportunity to engage with college and high school colleagues in a rigorous professional task. We create and sustain a consensus on writing quality and apply it to over 400,000 student essays fairly, consistently, and quickly.

This year, I was assigned to read Question Three, which called for students to write an argument. The directive says: "Carefully read the following passage by Susan Sontag. Then write an essay in which you support, refute, or qualify Sontag's claim that photography limits our understanding of the world. Use appropriate evidence to develop your argument." There followed a provocative and somewhat cryptic three-paragraph excerpt from *On Photography*.

Key to Success

Perhaps the single most important key to success on an AP Exam is the student's ability to see that the prompt identifies a task to be performed. Students who were successful on Question Three recognized key words in the prompt and were able to determine the task they were being asked to do.

Claim and Argument

This question was not merely an invitation to write discursively on the subject of photography. The word "claim" in the prompt should have alerted students to the need for writing in argumentative form. This point was reinforced by the explicit mention of "argument" in the last sentence. The question requires that students understand what an argument is and know how to construct one.

Support, Refute, or Qualify

The words "support, refute, or qualify" are technical terms that were not decoded in the question. Students need to know and need to have practiced these forms of argument during the term. (Some students misunderstood "qualify"; for example, "Sontag is not qualified to talk about photography.") In addition, these three words should signal to students that taking a position, even if a qualified one, is essential.

Evidence and Develop

The word "evidence" is also important. Students need to know not only what constitutes evidence, but the difference between evidence and example. Even "develop" conveyed important signals -- their argument needed to move forward; they couldn't just make one little point and assume they were developing it by adding six redundant illustrations.

Common Problems

Problems that prevented students from earning a high score on Question Three included:

Not taking a clear position or wavering between positions

Substituting a thesis-oriented expository essay for an argumentative essay

Being reluctant to engage in verbal combat because "everyone's entitled to his or her own opinion," so there's nothing to argue about

Slipping out of focus by discussing imagery in general

Trying to argue about photography by using evidence drawn from a literary reading list (for example, *Othello*, *The Scarlet Letter*) and sliding off topic into the theme of appearance and reality

Lacking clear connections between claims and the data, and the warrants needed to support them

Trying to analyze Sontag's rhetorical strategies or her style instead of arguing a point

SOME TIPS ON ORGANIZATION—GOOD ADVICE, COURTESY OF ANOTHER AP TEACHER (J. Glass)

GENERAL POINTERS ON ORGANIZATION FOR AP LANGUAGE TIMED WRITINGS

These are NOT five-paragraph essays! Your ideas should determine the length and organization of each essay response.

That said, here are some pointers:

1) Be sure that your thesis (main claim) is specific, answers the prompt, and voices an opinion.

2) One strategy for organizing the essay might be this one:

Short Intro: optional "hook," brief background info. (if applicable) +
MAIN CLAIM = thesis

Body Para 1 begins with Topic Sentence 1: Reason #1 for main claim
Body Para 2 begins with Topic Sentence 2: Reason #2 for main claim
and so on, for all Body Paragraphs

Short Conclusion

REMINDERS ABOUT EVIDENCE:

You should have two tiers of evidence in any argument or synthesis essay.

Tier One = your reasons for your main claim (thesis)

Tier Two = specific examples to illustrate the validity of your reasons

Note that a synthesis prompt makes your job a bit easier than an open-ended argument prompt by providing you with Tier Two evidence. The direct quotes, paraphrases, or facts you draw from the source documents can be your main Tier Two evidence. You can supplement with outside knowledge (although doing so is not required), but you must cite a minimum of three source documents.

YOU need to decide upon your Tier One evidence: your reasons. Your position should be your own, not just a summary of the sources.

ORGANIZATION PITFALLS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

<i>type of prompt</i>	<i>what <u>not</u> to do</i>	<i>what to do instead</i>
Rhetorical Analysis	go paragraph-by-paragraph through the passage ("First, the author uses this strategy; then, in the second paragraph, she does this...").	organize body paragraphs by <u>effects of rhetorical strategies</u> group together strategies that have similar effects/work toward the same end
Defend/ Challenge/ Qualify a Claim OR Synthesis Argument ("Develop a Position")	state position in a single sentence in intro; then, organize body paragraphs by very specific, narrow examples, not include any Tier 2 evidence.	develop a full argument* by stating <u>several reasons</u> for your position (*more on next slide) <u>organize body paragraphs by reasons</u> synthesize several examples as support for each reason (use source doc's for synthesis)

WHAT CONSTITUTES A FULLY DEVELOPED ARGUMENT?

1) Stance that addresses the complexity of the problem/question:

- A qualified main claim is often best.
- Be sure to cite and develop several reasons for the main claim.

2) Concessions: how to incorporate?

Use modified Rogerian structure, AND/OR, work into your syntax:

- "Although X, Y"
- Admittedly, X is a concern; however,...
- So-and-so's claim that X has some validity given...; however,...

3) Use of outside knowledge and/or sources that goes beyond summary; explains HOW evidence proves claim

4) Synthesis of sources: grouping sources in meaningful ways to support YOUR position (and to make concessions).

Again, avoiding organizing paragraphs example-by-example or source-by-source.

COMPARISON OF AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE SYNTHESIS ESSAY AND APUSH DBQ

Synthesis Essay

Document-Based Question

Similarities

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Use sources to support a thesis | 1. Use documents to support a thesis |
| 2. Must cite sources | 2. Must cite sources |
| 3. Read for 15 minutes (suggested) | 3. Read for 15 minutes (suggested) |
| 4. Do not simply paraphrase -- no "laundry list" | 4. Do not simply paraphrase -- no "laundry list" |
| 5. Must "enter into a conversation" | 5. Must understand the complexity of the historical issue to "enter into a conversation" |
| 6. Consider the author's purpose, audience, and point of view | 6. Consider the author's purpose, audience, and point of view |
| 7. Must develop a clear, organized argument | 7. Must develop a clear, organized argument |

Differences

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Sources provided | 1. Documents provided |
| 2. Primary and secondary sources used | 2. Only primary sources used |
| 3. Suggested writing time: 40 minutes | 3. Suggested writing time: 45 minutes |
| 4. Outside information not required | 4. Outside information required |
| 5. Must use a minimum of three sources | 5. Expected to use more than half of the documents (not specifically stated in the directions) |
| 6. Prompt in three parts: directions, introduction, and assignment | 6. Directions with statement or question |

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