AP Language and Composition ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

One of the three essays on the Advanced English Language exam is the argumentative essay. Because it is often seen as a "give away," many students believe it to be the easiest of the three essays to write. Unfortunately, too many students spend too little time in the actual planning of this essay and, as a result, present an underdeveloped, illogical, or off-topic piece. Although there is a great deal of latitude given for the response to the prompt, the argumentative essay demands careful reading and planning.

**What Does the Argumentative Essay Require of Me?**

Basically, you need to do three things:

* **understand the** nature of the position taken in the **promp**t;
* take a specific stand—**defend, challenge, or qualify**—with the assertion in the prompt; and
* clearly and logically **suppor**t your claim.

**What Does It Mean to Agree, Disagree, or Qualify?**

An argumentative essay on the AP English Language and Composition exam will present you with an excerpt or a statement. Once you understand what the passage is saying, you have to ask yourself: Do I think about this subject in the same way as the writer/speaker? (Agree) Do I think the writer/speaker is totally wrong? (Disagree) Do I think some of what is said is correct and some incorrect? (Qualify) Regardless of the synonyms used, these are the three choices you will have.

**Timing and Planning the Essay**

**How Should I Approach the Writing of My Argumentative Essay?**

Before beginning to actually write the essay, you need to do some quick planning. You could brainstorm a list of ideas, construct a chart, or create an outline. Whatever it is, you MUST find a way to allow yourself to think through the issue and your position.

Once I've Chosen My Position on the Given Issue, How Do I Go About Supporting It?

Remember that you've been taught how to write an argument throughout your school years, and you've even studied it in detail in your AP Comp course this year. Here is a brief overview of the kinds of support/evidence you could include to bolster your argument:

— facts/statistics

— details

— quotations

— dialog

— needed definitions

— recognition of the opposition

— examples

— anecdotes

— contrast and comparison

— cause and effect

— appeal to authority

Just make certain to choose the strategy or strategies that are most familiar to you and with which you feel most comfortable. Don't try to "con" your reader or pad your essay with irrelevancies.

**Does It Matter What Tone I Take in My Argumentative Essay?**

The College Board and the AP Comp readers are open to a wide range of approaches. You can choose to be informal and personal, formal and objective, or even humorous and irreverent, and anything in between. Just be certain that your choice is appropriate for your purpose.

**Will I Be Penalized for Taking an Unpopular, Unexpected, Irreverent, or Bizarre Position on the Given Issue?**

As long as you are addressing the prompt and appropriately supporting your position, there is no danger of your losing points on your essay, because you've decided to take a different approach. Your essay is graded for process and mastery and manipulation of language, not for how close you come to the viewpoint of your reader.

**How Should I Plan to Spend My Time Writing the Argumentative Essay?**

Learning to budget your time is a skill that can be most helpful in writing the successful essay. The following is a sample timeline for you to consider:

* 1–3 minutes reading and working the prompt
* 3 minutes deciding on a position
* 10–12 minutes planning the support of your position
* 20 minutes writing the essay
* 3 minutes proofreading