

AP English Language and Composition Course Overview

An AP English Language and Composition course cultivates the reading and writing skills that students need for college success and for intellectually responsible civic engagement. The course guides students in becoming curious, critical, and responsive readers of diverse texts, and becoming flexible, reflective writers of texts addressed to diverse audiences for diverse purposes. The reading and writing students do in the course should deepen and expand their understanding of how written language functions *rhetorically*: to communicate writers' intentions and elicit readers' responses in particular situations. The course cultivates the rhetorical understanding and use of written language by directing students' attention to writer/reader interactions in their reading and writing of various formal and informal genres (e.g., memos, letters, advertisements, political satires, personal narratives, scientific arguments, cultural critiques, research reports).

Reading and writing activities in the course also deepen students' knowledge and control of formal conventions of written language (e.g., vocabulary, diction, syntax, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, genre). The course helps students understand that formal conventions of the English language in its many written and spoken dialects are historically, culturally, and socially produced; that the use of these conventions may intentionally or unintentionally contribute to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a piece of writing in a particular rhetorical context; and that a particular set of language conventions defines Standard Written English, the preferred dialect for academic discourse.

Course Goals

The goals of an AP English Language and Composition course are diverse because the rhetoric and composition course in college serves a variety of functions in the undergraduate curriculum. The following, however, are the primary goals of the course:

- ▶ **Developing critical literacy:** In most colleges and universities, the course is intended to strengthen the basic academic skills students need to perform confidently and effectively in courses across the curriculum. The course introduces students to the literacy expectations of higher education by cultivating essential academic skills such as critical inquiry, deliberation, argument, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Few colleges and universities regard completion of this entry-level course as the endpoint of students' English language education; subsequent courses in general and specialized curricula should continue building and refining the skills students practice in their rhetoric and composition courses.
- ▶ **Facilitating informed citizenship:** While most college rhetoric and composition courses perform the academic service of preparing students to meet the literacy challenges of college-level study, they also serve the larger goal of cultivating the critical literacy skills students need for lifelong learning. Beyond their academic lives, students should be able to use the literacy skills practiced in the course for personal satisfaction and responsible engagement in civic life.

To support these goals, rhetoric and composition courses emphasize the reading and writing of analytic and argumentative texts instead of, or in combination with, texts representing English-language literary traditions. Like the college rhetoric and composition course, the AP English Language and Composition course focuses students' attention on the functions of written language in and out of the academy, asking students to practice the reading as well as the writing of texts designed to inquire, to explain, to criticize, and to persuade in a variety of rhetorical situations. In this approach to the study and practice of written language, a writer's style is important because of its rhetorical, rather than its aesthetic, function.