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Ap english lit exam

The AP English Literature and Composition Exam is 3 hours long and broken up into two sections. Section I (One hour) 45 percent of total score 55 multiple-choice questions based on 2 or 3 poems and 2 or 3 passages of fiction Section II (Two hours) 55 percent of total score 3 essays Essay 1: An analysis of a poem Essay 2: An analysis of a prose passage from a work of fiction, a letter, or a speech in a play Essay 3: An analytical essay on a novel or play of your choice AP English Literature and Composition Glossary If you are a mobile user, click here: Do AP English Literature and Composition Practice Questions. AP English Literature and Composition Multiple-Choice Practice Tests AP English Literature and Composition Free-Response Practice Tests AP English Literature and Composition Downloads If you're planning to take the AP English Literature and Composition exam, you'll need to get familiar with what to expect on the test. Whether the 2025 test date of Wednesday, May 7, is near or far, I'm here to help you get serious about preparing for the exam. In this guide, I'll go over the test's format and question types, how it's graded, best practices for preparation, and test-day tips. You'll be on your way to AP English Lit success in no time! AP English Literature: Exam Format and Question Types The AP Literature Exam is a three-hour exam that contains two sections in this order: An hour-long, 55-question multiple-choice section A two-hour, three-question free-response section The exam tests your ability to analyze works and excerpts of literature and cogently communicate that analysis in essay form. Read on for a breakdown of the two different sections and their question types. Section I: Multiple Choice The multiple-choice section, or Section I of the AP Literature exam, is 60 minutes long and has 55 questions. It counts for 45% of your overall exam grade. You can expect to see five excerpts of prose and poetry. You will always get at least two prose passages (fiction or drama) and two poetry passages. In general, you will not be given the author, date, or title for these works, though occasionally the title of a poem will be given. Unusual words are also sometimes defined for you. The date ranges of these works could fall from the 16th to the 21st century. Most works will be originally written in English, but you might occasionally see a passage in translation. There are, generally speaking, eight kinds of questions you can expect to see on the AP English Literature and Composition exam. I'll break each of them down here and give you tips on how to identify and approach them. "Pretty flowers carried by ladies" is not one of the question types. The 8 Multiple-Choice Question Types on the AP Literature Exam Without further delay, here are the eight question types you can expect to see on the AP Lit exam. All questions are taken from the sample questions on the AP Course and Exam Description. NOTE: In 2025, the English Literature AP exam changed to only have four answer choices for each multiple-choice question (previously there were five). The question types are the same, so just picture the examples below with four answer options instead of five! #1: Reading Comprehension These questions test your ability to understand what the passage is saying on a pretty basic level. They don't require you to do a lot of interpretation—you just need to know what's going on. You can identify this question type from words and phrases such as "according to," "mentioned," "asserting," and so on. You'll succeed on these questions as long as you carefully read the text. Note that you might have to go back and reread parts to make sure you understand what the passage is saying. Example: #2: Inference These questions ask you to infer something—a character or narrator's opinion, an author's intention, etc.—based on what is said in the passage. It will be something that isn't stated directly or concretely but that you can assume based on what's clearly written in the passage. You can identify these questions from words such as "infer" and "imply." The key to these questions is to not get tripped up by the fact that you are making an inference—there will be a best answer, and it will be the choice that is best supported by what is actually found in the passage. In many ways, inference questions are like second-level reading comprehension questions: you need to know not just what a passage says, but also what it means. Example: #3: Identifying and Interpreting Figurative Language These are questions for which you have to either identify what word or phrase is figurative language or provide the meaning of a figurative phrase. You can identify these as they will either explicitly mention figurative language (or a figurative device, such as a simile or metaphor) or include a figurative phrase in the question itself. The meaning of figurative phrases can normally be determined by that phrase's context in the passage—what is said around it? What is the phrase referring to? Example 1: Identifying Example 2: Interpreting #4: Literary Technique These questions involve identifying why an author does what they do, from using a particular phrase to repeating certain words. Basically, what techniques is the author using to construct the passage/poem, and to what effect? You can identify these questions by words/phrases such as "serves chiefly to," "effect," "evoke," and "in order to." A good way to approach these questions is to ask yourself: so what? Why did the author use these particular words or this particular structure? Example: #5: Character Analysis These questions ask you to describe something about a character. You can spot them because they will refer directly to characters' attitudes, opinions, beliefs, or relationships with other characters. This is, in many ways, a special kind of inference question, since you are inferring the broader personality of the character based on the evidence in a passage. Also, these crop up much more commonly for prose passages than they do for poetry ones. Example: #6: Overall Passage Questions Some questions ask you to identify or describe something about the passage or poem as a whole: its purpose, tone, genre, etc. You can identify these by phrases such as "in the passage" and "as a whole." To answer these questions, you need to think about the excerpt with a bird's-eye view. What is the overall picture created by all the tiny details? Example: #7: Structure Some AP Lit questions will ask you about specific structural elements of the passage: a shift in tone, a digression, the specific form of a poem, etc. Often these questions will specify a part of the passage/poem and ask you to identify what that part is accomplishing. Being able to identify and understand the significance of any shifts—structural, tonal, in genre, and so on—will be of key importance for these questions. Example: #8: Grammar/Nuts & Bolts Very occasionally you will be asked a specific grammar question, such as what word an adjective is modifying. I'd also include in this category super-specific questions such as those that ask about the meter of a poem (e.g., iambic pentameter). These questions are less about literary artistry and more about the fairly dry technique involved in having a fluent command of the English language. Example: That covers the eight question types on the multiple-choice section. Now, let's take a look at the free-response section of the AP Literature exam. Keep track of the nuts and bolts of grammar. Section II: Free Response The AP Literature Free Response section is two hours long and involves three free-response essay questions, so you'll have about 40 minutes per essay. That's not a lot of time considering this section of the test counts for 55% of your overall exam grade! Note, though, that no one will prompt you to move from essay to essay, so you can theoretically divide up the time however you want. Just be sure to leave enough time for each essay! Skipping an essay, or running out of time so you have to rush through one, can really impact your final test score. The first two essays are literary analysis essays of specific passages, with one poem and one prose excerpt. The final essay is an analysis of a given theme in a work selected by you, the student. Essays 1 & 2: Literary Passage Analysis For the first two essays, you'll be presented with an excerpt for a given theme, device, or development. One of the passages will be poetry, and one will be prose. You will be provided with the author of the work, the approximate date, and some orienting information (i.e., the plot context of an excerpt from a novel). Below are some sample questions from the 2022 Free Response Questions. Poetry: Prose: Essay 3: Thematic Analysis For the third and final essay, you'll be asked to discuss a particular theme in a work that you select. You will be provided with a list of notable works that address the given theme below the prompt, but you can also choose to discuss any "work of literary merit." So while you do have the power to choose which work you wish to write an essay about, the key words here are "literary merit." That means no genre fiction! (I know, I know—lots of genre fiction works do have literary merit and Shakespeare actually began as low culture, and so on and so forth. Indeed, you might find academic designations of "literary merit" elitist and problematic, but the time to rage against the literary establishment is not your AP Lit test! Save it for a really, really good college admissions essay instead.) Here's a sample question from 2022: As you can see, the list of works provided spans many time periods and countries: there are ancient Greek plays (Antigone), modern literary works (such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*), Shakespeare plays (*The Tempest*), 19th-century English plays (*The Importance of Being Earnest*), etc. So you have a lot to work with! Also note that you can choose a work of "comparable literary merit." That means you can select a work not on this list as long as it's as difficult and meaningful as the example titles you've been given. So for example, Jane Eyre or East of Eden would be great choices, but *Twilight* or *The Hunger Games* would not. Our advice? If you're not sure what a work of "comparable literary merit" is, stick to the titles on the provided list. You might even see something by this guy. How is the AP Literature Test Graded? The multiple-choice section of the exam comprises 45% of your total exam score; the three essays, or free-response section, comprise the other 55%. Each essay, then, is worth about 18% of your grade. As on other AP exams, your raw score will be converted to a score from 1-5. You don't have to get every point possible to get a 5 by any means. In 2024, 13.7% of students received 5s on the AP English Literature test. So, how do you calculate your raw scores? Multiple-Choice Scoring For the multiple-choice section, you receive 1 point for each question you answer correctly. There's no guessing penalty, so you should answer every question—but guess only after you're able to eliminate any answer you know is wrong to up your chances of choosing the right one. Free-Response Scoring For multiple choice is pretty straightforward; however, essay scoring is a little more complicated. Each of your essays will receive a score from 0 to 6 based on the College Board rubric, which also includes question-specific rubrics. All the rubrics are very similar, with only minor differences between them. Each essay rubric has three elements you'll be graded on: Thesis (0-1 points) Evidence and Commentary (0-4 points) Sophistication (0-1 points) We'll be looking at the current rubric for the AP Lit exam, which was released in September 2019, and what every score means for each of the three elements above: Score Thesis Evidence and Commentary Sophistication 0 Restates prompt. Makes generalized comment. Describes work rather than making a claim. Is incoherent or does not address prompt. May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant. Attempts to contextualize interpretation consist mainly of sweeping generalizations. Only hints at other interpretations. Does not consistently maintain thematic interpretation. Oversimplifies complexities. Uses overly complex language. 1 Provides defensible interpretation in response to prompt. Focuses on broad elements, summary, or description rather than specific details or techniques. Mentions literary elements, devices, or techniques with little or no explanation. Identifies and explores complexities/tensions within work. Situates interpretation within broader context. Accounts for alternative interpretations. Style is consistently vivid and persuasive. 2 — Consists of mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations. Does not make multiple supporting claims or does not support more than one claim. No clear connections or progression between claims. — 3 — Uniformly offers evidence to support claims. Focuses on importance of specific words and details. Organizes argument as line of reasoning composed of several supporting claims. Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or support key claim. — 4 — Uniformly offers evidence to support claims. Focuses on importance of specific words and details. Organizes argument as line of reasoning composed of several supporting claims, each with adequate evidence. Explains how use of literary techniques contributes to interpretation. — To get a high-scoring essay in the 5-6 point range, you'll need to not only come up with an original and intriguing argument that you thoroughly support with textual evidence, but you'll also need to stay focused, organized, and clear. And all in just 40 minutes per essay! If getting a high score on this section sounds like a tall order, that's because it is. Practice makes perfect! Skill-Building for Success on the AP Literature Exam There are several things you can do to hone your skills and best prepare for the AP Lit exam. Read Some Books, Maybe More Than Once One of the most important steps you can take to prepare for the AP Literature and Composition exam is to read a lot and read well. You'll be reading a wide variety of notable literary works in your AP English Literature course, but additional reading will help you further develop your analytical reading skills. In addition to reading broadly, you'll want to become especially familiar with the details of four to five books with different themes so you'll be prepared to write a strong student-choice essay. You should know the plot, themes, characters, and structural details of these books inside and out. See my AP English Literature Reading List for more guidance. Read (and Interpret) Poetry One thing students might not do very much on their own time but that will help a lot with AP Lit exam prep is to read poetry. Try to read poems from a lot of eras and authors to get familiar with the language. We know that poetry can be intimidating. That's why we've put together a bunch of guides to help you crack the poetry code (so to speak). You can learn more about poetic devices—like imagery and iambic pentameter—in our comprehensive guide. Then you can see those analytical skills in action in our expert analysis of "Do not go gentle into that good night" by Dylan Thomas. When you think you have a grip on basic comprehension, you can then move on to close reading (see below). Hone Your Close Reading and Analysis Skills Your AP class will likely focus heavily on close reading and analysis of prose and poetry, but extra practice won't hurt you. Close reading is the ability to identify which techniques the author is using and why. You'll need to be able to do this both to gather evidence for original arguments on the free-response questions and to answer analytical multiple-choice questions. Here are some helpful close reading resources for prose. And here are some for poetry: Learn Literary and Poetic Devices You'll want to be familiar with literary terms so that any test questions that ask about them will make sense to you. Again, you'll probably learn most of these in class, but it doesn't hurt to brush up on them. Here are some comprehensive lists of literary terms with definitions: Practice Writing Essays The majority of your grade on the AP English Lit exam comes from essays, so it's critical that you practice your timed essay-writing skills. You of course should use the College Board's released free-response questions to practice writing complete timed essays of each type, but you can also practice quickly outlining thorough essays that are well supported with textual evidence. Take Practice Tests Taking practice tests is a great way to prepare for the exam. It will help you get familiar with the exam format and overall experience. You can get sample questions from the Course and Exam Description, the College Board website, and our guide to AP English Lit practice test resources. Be aware that the released exams don't have complete slates of free-response questions, so you might need to supplement these with released free-response questions. Since there are two complete released exams, you can take one toward the beginning of your prep time to get familiar with the exam and set a benchmark and one toward the end to make sure the experience is fresh in your mind and to check your progress. Don't wander like a lonely cloud through your AP Lit prep. AP Literature: 6 Critical Test-Day Tips Before we wrap up, here are my six top tips for AP Lit test day: #1: On the multiple-choice section, it's to your advantage to answer every question. If you eliminate all the answers you know are wrong before guessing, you'll raise your chances of guessing the correct one. #2: Don't rely on your memory of the passage when answering multiple-choice questions (or when writing essays, for that matter). Look back at the passage! #3: Interact with the text: circle, mark, underline, make notes—whatever floats your boat. This will help you retain information and actively engage with the passage. #4: This was mentioned above, but it's critical that you know four to five books well for the student-choice essay. You'll want to know all the characters, the plot, the themes, and any major devices or motifs the author uses throughout. #5: Be sure to plan out your essays! Organization and focus are critical for high-scoring AP Literature essays. An outline will take you a few minutes, but it will help your writing process go much faster. #6: Manage your time on essays closely. One strategy is to start with the essay you think will be the easiest to write. This way you'll be able to get through it while thinking about the other two essays. And don't forget to eat breakfast! Apron optional. AP Literature Exam: Key Takeaways The AP Literature exam is a three-hour test that includes an hour-long multiple-choice section based on five prose and poetry passages and with 55 questions, and a two-hour free-response section with three essays: one analyzing a prose passage, one analyzing a prose passage, and one analyzing a work chosen by you, the student. The multiple-choice section is worth 45% of your total score, and the free-response section is worth 55%. The three essays are each scored on a rubric of 0-6, and raw scores are converted to a final scaled score from 1 to 5. Here are some things you can do to prepare for the exam: Read books and be particularly familiar with four to five works for the student-choice essays Read poetry Work on your close reading and analysis skills Learn common literary devices Practice writing essays Take practice tests! On test day, be sure to really look closely at all the passages and really interact with them by marking the text in a way that makes sense to you. This will help on both multiple-choice questions and the free-response essays. You should also outline your essays before you write them. With all this in mind, you're well on your way to AP Lit success! What's Next? If you're taking other AP exams this year, you might be interested in our other AP resources: from the Ultimate Guide to the US History Exam, to the Ultimate AP Chemistry Study Guide, to the Best AP Psychology Study Guide, we have tons of articles on AP courses and exams for you! Looking for practice exams? Here are some tips on how to find the best AP practice tests. We've also got comprehensive lists of practice tests for AP Psychology, AP Biology, AP Chemistry, and AP US History. Deciding which APs to take? Take a look through the complete list of AP courses and tests, read our analysis of which AP classes are the hardest and easiest, and learn how many AP classes you should take. Be sure to work through some of these AP English Literature practice exams. There are hundreds of challenging practice questions to try. Perfect for your test prep and review. This is the official AP English Literature practice exam that was released by the College Board in 2012. A valuable resource for test prep that will give you practice with real AP questions. There are 3 good practice tests here with some very challenging questions. Each practice test has 11 multiple choice questions along with detailed explanations. This is a good PDF practice test that includes very thorough explanations of the correct answers. You should be sure to check this one out. Challenging AP Literature practice questions. A variety of passages covering Poetry, Prose, and Drama. Note that registration is required. There are 46 AP Literature multiple choice questions in the College Board course description on pages 12 to 27. Also includes sample free response questions. A great review! Over 500 free practice questions with full answer explanations. These questions are all organized by topic. Practice with the whole set or pick a specific category. This is a great set of AP English Literature flashcards from Quizlet which covers 235 key vocabulary words. AP English Literature | Practice Exams | Free Response | Vocab | Study Guides