GRADE 9 · PRE-AP FOUNDATIONS

AP English Readiness Guide

What a 9th grader should know, practice, and be able to do to build toward AP English Language and AP English Literature.

"Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man."

— *Francis Bacon, "Of Studies" (1625)*

1 The Road to AP English
2 The AP Exams at a Glance
3 Reading Toolkit: Close Reading
4 Rhetoric Toolkit
5 Literary Toolkit
6 Words for Analysis
7 Writing Toolkit
8 Grammar and Style
9 Skills for the AP Essays
10 Books and Texts Worth Knowing
11 Mistakes to Avoid
12 Study Plan and Resources
13 End-of-Year Self-Check
14 Practice
15 Answer Key

How to use this guide: sections marked CORE are what most 9th-grade English classes cover. Sections marked GET AHEAD are usually taught in 10th grade or in the AP year — learning them early pays off on both AP exams.

Name: _____ Class / Period: _____

1 The Road to AP English

AP English is really two college-level courses with two exams: AP English Language (nonfiction and argument) and AP English Literature (fiction, poetry, and drama). Most students take them in 11th and 12th grade, so 9th grade is where the reading and writing habits get built.

Grade 9

English 1 or Pre-AP English 1 · Foundations

- Close reading and annotation
- Claim, evidence, and commentary
- Stories, poems, a Shakespeare play
- Clear, correct sentences

Grade 10

English 2 or Pre-AP English 2 · Building analysis

- Analyzing speeches and essays
- Full essays with a line of reasoning
- Longer novels, world literature
- Timed writing, MLA citation

Grade 11

AP English Language and Composition

- Nonfiction: speeches, letters, articles
- Rhetorical analysis, argument, and synthesis
- AP exam in May

Grade 12

AP English Literature and Composition

- Fiction, poetry, and drama
- Poetry and prose analysis
- Literary argument
- AP exam in May

Schools sequence courses differently. Some offer the two AP courses in the other order or only one of them; some add AP Seminar and AP Research (the AP Capstone program) or dual-enrollment college English instead.

What AP English actually tests

Neither exam tests vocabulary lists or grammar terms directly. Both measure how well you read closely and write about what you read. Vocabulary and grammar are the tools; analysis and argument are the goal.

Skill	What it means	Grade 9 version
Close reading	Noticing what a text says and how: word choice, images, sentence shapes, structure.	Annotate a page; explain why an author chose one word.
Rhetorical analysis (Lang)	Explaining how a writer's choices work on an audience to achieve a purpose.	Name one choice in a speech and explain how it moves listeners.
Literary analysis (Lit)	Explaining how character, setting, structure, and figurative language create meaning.	Write a paragraph on how a symbol develops a theme.
Argument	Taking a defensible position and supporting it with evidence and reasoning.	Write an opinion paragraph with two reasons and a counterargument.
Synthesis (Lang)	Combining ideas from several sources into an argument of your own.	Use two short articles to support one claim, naming each.

The habits that matter most in 9th grade

Read every day

Twenty minutes of anything you choose. Readers who read a lot absorb how good sentences sound.

Annotate as you go

Read with a pencil. Marks and margin notes turn reading into thinking, and into evidence.

Write often, a little

One paragraph a week about something you read. Writing is built by repetitions.

Keep a words-and-mistakes notebook

Collect new words and every correction your teacher makes. Review it weekly.

2 The AP Exams at a Glance

Both exams are given in May and scored from 1 to 5. Many colleges award credit or placement for a 3 or higher. Both are now digital: you read the passages and type your essays in the College Board's Bluebook app.

Section	Questions	Time	Share of score
AP English Language and Composition (usually 11th grade)			
Section I — Multiple Choice about 23–25 reading questions on nonfiction passages and 20–22 writing questions that ask how to revise a draft	45	1 hr	45%
Section II — Free Response	3 essays	2 hr 15 min, including a 15-min reading period	55%
Essay 1: Synthesis	Argue a position using at least 3 of 6–7 provided sources.		
Essay 2: Rhetorical Analysis	Analyze how a nonfiction writer's choices serve the purpose of a text.		
Essay 3: Argument	Defend a position on an issue using evidence from your own knowledge.		
AP English Literature and Composition (usually 12th grade)			
Section I — Multiple Choice questions on prose and poetry passages	55	1 hr	45%
Section II — Free Response	3 essays	2 hr	55%
Essay 1: Poetry Analysis	Analyze how a poem's choices create meaning.		
Essay 2: Prose Fiction Analysis	Analyze a passage from a novel or short story.		
Essay 3: Literary Argument	Answer an open question about a literary work you choose.		

Format per the College Board's Course and Exam Descriptions. Details can change: check AP Central (apcentral.collegeboard.org) during the year you take each exam.

How the essays are scored

Every essay on both exams is scored from 0 to 6 with the same three-row rubric. Readers are trained English teachers and professors. They reward what you do well; they do not subtract a point for each mistake.

Rubric row	Points	What it means in plain words
Thesis	0–1	A defensible claim that answers exactly what the prompt asks. "Defensible" means a thoughtful reader could disagree. Restating the prompt or stating a fact earns 0.
Evidence and Commentary	0–4	Where most points live. You choose **specific** evidence (quotations, details, examples) and **explain how** it supports your claim. Mostly summary earns 1; some explanation earns 2 or 3; consistent explanation of all your evidence, in a clear line of reasoning, earns 4.
Sophistication	0–1	Thinking beyond a solid essay: exploring a tension or complexity, placing your argument in a broader context, or writing in a consistently vivid, persuasive style. One fancy word does not earn it.

> **The 9th-grade takeaway**
>
> A 6 is not a perfect essay. Readers reward a clear, arguable claim, specific evidence, and commentary that explains how and why the evidence proves the claim. You can practice all three in every paragraph you write this year.

3 Reading Toolkit: Close Reading

Close reading means reading slowly enough to notice choices. Every AP question, multiple-choice or essay, starts here.

An annotation code CORE

Underline	The main claim or a key idea
Circle	A word that stands out: strong, strange, or repeated
Box	A shift: **but, yet, however, suddenly**
? / !	Confusing / surprising or powerful
★	A line you could quote in an essay
Arrow	Connects repeated words, images, or ideas
Margin note	A 3–6 word summary of each paragraph or stanza

Read three times CORE

1 · What?	Who is speaking, to whom, about what? Sum it up in one sentence.
2 · How?	Which choices stand out — words, images, sentence shapes, structure, shifts?
3 · Why?	What do those choices do to the reader? What larger meaning or purpose do they serve?

> **Annotate for a purpose**
>
> Know what you are looking for: tone, a character's change, the argument. Three thoughtful notes beat thirty highlights.

SOAPSTone: the situation behind any text CORE

Letter	Ask yourself	Example: Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (1852)
Speaker	Who is the voice? What do we know about them?	Douglass, a formerly enslaved man and leading abolitionist
Occasion	What time, place, or event prompted it?	An Independence Day address in Rochester, New York, July 5, 1852
Audience	Who is it for? What do they already believe?	Mostly white Northerners at an antislavery society's event
Purpose	What should the audience think, feel, or do?	See the hypocrisy of celebrating liberty while slavery exists, and act
Subject	What is the topic, in a few words?	Slavery and the meaning of American freedom
Tone	What is the writer's attitude? (See section 6.)	Indignant and ironic, turning hopeful at the close

TP-CASTT for poems CORE

Title	What might the poem be about?
Paraphrase	What happens, line by line, in plain words?
Connotation	What do the images and words suggest beyond their literal meaning?
Attitude	What is the speaker's tone?
Shifts	Where do tone or focus change? Look for **but**, **yet**, stanza breaks.
Title	What does the title mean now?
Theme	What does the poem say about life, in a full sentence?

Nonfiction vs. fiction CORE

	Nonfiction	Fiction, poetry
Who talks?	The writer, in a real situation	A narrator or speaker the author invented
Goal	Persuade, inform, reflect	Explore an experience; meaning is implied
You analyze	Rhetorical choices	Literary elements
AP course	AP Lang	AP Lit

The narrator is not the author

Write "the narrator" or "the speaker," not the author's name, unless you mean the author's choices: **Poe's narrator insists he is sane.**

Get ahead: the rhetorical précis

A four-sentence summary that many AP Lang teachers assign. Try it on any article or speech:

1. Author, genre, title, and date, then a precise verb (**argues, asserts, suggests**) and the main claim.
2. How the author develops the claim: the main moves, in order.
3. The author's purpose, stated with "in order to …"
4. The intended audience, and the tone the author takes with them.

4 Rhetoric Toolkit

Rhetoric is the art of using language to move an audience. AP Lang asks you to explain a writer's choices: what the writer does, and why it works for this audience at this moment.

The rhetorical situation CORE

Element	What it means	Example: a student asks the school board for a later start time
Exigence	The spark: a problem or event	A survey finds most students sleep under seven hours.
Purpose	What the writer wants	Convince the board to vote for an 8:30 start.
Audience	Who must be won over	Board members and parents worried about buses and cost.
Context	Time, place, circumstances	The board sets next year's schedule; money is tight.
Message	The main claim	A later start improves health and learning at modest cost.

Ethos, pathos, and logos CORE

Appeal	What it is	Example (from the same speech)
Ethos	Credibility: why we should trust the speaker	**"I have run the student survey for two years, and I have read every response."**
Pathos	Emotions and values the audience holds	**"Picture a fourteen-year-old waiting alone at a dark bus stop at 6:15 a.m."**
Logos	Logic and evidence: facts, examples, causes	**"Most students in our survey sleep far less than the eight to ten hours doctors recommend for teens."**

Labels earn nothing on their own

"The author uses pathos" is not analysis. Say **what** the writer does (opens with a child at a dark bus stop) and **how** it moves this audience toward the purpose.

Get ahead: kairos

Kairos is the opportune moment: how a writer seizes the timing and urgency of a situation. A speech the week before a vote has power it would lack a month later.

Rhetorical choices to recognize CORE

Choice	What it is	Example
Words and sentences		
Diction	Word choice, especially connotation (the feelings a word carries)	Calling a plan **reckless** instead of **bold**
Allusion	A reference to a well-known person, event, or text	**"Don't be such a Scrooge about the budget."**
Syntax	Sentence structure and length; a short sentence after long ones lands hard	**We planned for months, raised money, and rehearsed every step. It failed.**

Choice	What it is	Example
Parallelism	Related ideas in the same grammatical form	**She came to learn, to lead, and to listen.**
Anaphora	Repeating words at the start of successive clauses	**We will practice. We will prepare. We will win.**
Antithesis	Contrasting ideas in balanced form	**It is easy to start; it is hard to finish.**
Rhetorical question	A question asked for effect, not for an answer	**Who among us has never needed a second chance?**
Argument moves		
Juxtaposition	Placing two things side by side to sharpen a contrast	**The new stadium gleams beside a library with a leaking roof.**
Concession and counterargument	Granting a point to the other side, then answering it	**Admittedly, a later start costs money; however, exhausted students cost more.**
Anecdote / analogy	A brief story that makes a point personal / a comparison that explains the unfamiliar	**A school without a library is a kitchen without a stove.**
Get ahead		
Asyndeton / polysyndeton	Dropping conjunctions for speed / piling them up for weight	**I came, I saw, I conquered. · We ran and laughed and stayed out.**
Chiasmus	Repeating ideas in reverse order (ABBA)	**Eat to live; do not live to eat.**
Tricolon	Three parallel parts, often building	**Read widely, write daily, revise ruthlessly.**

Turn any choice into analysis: the writer **[precise verb + the choice]** to **[create an effect on this audience]**, which **[advances the purpose]**.
By opening with a student at a dark bus stop, the speaker makes the board feel the human cost of an early start, which prepares them to accept her proposal.

Famous lines, famous choices

Line	Choice	Effect
"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)	Antithesis, parallelism	Captures an age of extremes in one balanced breath.
"With malice toward none, with charity for all" Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address (1865)	Parallelism, anaphora	The balanced phrases model the reconciliation he asks for.
"ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country" Kennedy, Inaugural Address (1961)	Chiasmus	Reverses the words to reverse the listener's sense of duty.
"If you prick us, do we not bleed?" Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*	Rhetorical question	Forces the audience to admit a shared humanity.

5 Literary Toolkit

AP Lit asks how a work creates meaning. Learn these terms so you can name what you notice — then always explain what it does.

Plot structure CORE

Exposition	Characters, setting, situation
Rising action	Complications build
Climax	The turning point
Falling action	Consequences unfold
Resolution	The conflict ends (*denouement*)
Flashback	A scene from the past
Foreshadowing	Hints of what is coming

Conflict CORE

External	
vs. character	Two people with opposing goals
vs. society	Against laws, customs, or a group
vs. nature	Against weather, animals, the wild
vs. fate	Against forces beyond human control
Internal	
vs. self	A struggle inside one mind: fear, guilt, a hard choice

Character and point of view CORE

Direct / indirect characterization	The narrator tells us (**Maya was stubborn.**) / we infer it from **STEAL**: Speech, Thoughts, Effect on others, Actions, and Looks (**Maya frowned at the instructions and did it her way anyway.**)
Protagonist / antagonist	The central character / the character or force that opposes them
Foil	A character whose contrast highlights another's traits: calm Benvolio beside hot-tempered Tybalt
Dynamic / static	Changes in an important way / stays essentially the same
First person	The narrator is a character who says "I"; we know only what they know and choose to tell
Third-person limited / omniscient	An outside narrator follows one character's thoughts / knows the thoughts of many
Unreliable narrator GET AHEAD	A narrator we cannot fully trust, because of bias, ignorance, or madness. The narrator of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) insists he is sane while describing a murder.

Setting, theme, symbol, and irony CORE

Term	What it means	Example
Setting	Time and place; it can create mood and shape the conflict	A deserted island removes every adult rule in *Lord of the Flies*.
Topic vs. theme	A topic is a word or two; a theme is a full-sentence insight about life	Topic: **ambition**. Theme: **Unchecked ambition can destroy the person who pursues it.**
Symbol	Something concrete that stands for an idea beyond itself	The conch in *Lord of the Flies* stands for order and the right to speak.

Term	What it means	Example
Motif	A repeated image, idea, or word that develops a theme	Images of blood return again and again in *Macbeth*, tracking guilt.
Three kinds of irony		
Verbal	Saying the opposite of what you mean (sarcasm is a harsh form)	**"Lovely weather,"** said during a downpour
Situational	The outcome is the opposite of what we expect	In O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi," Della sells her hair to buy Jim a watch chain, and Jim sells his watch to buy her combs.
Dramatic	The audience knows something a character does not	We know Juliet is only drugged, not dead; Romeo does not.

Poetry toolkit CORE

Term	What it means	Example or tip
Speaker	The voice of the poem, not necessarily the poet	Write "the speaker," not the poet's name.
Line / stanza	One row of verse / a group of lines, like a paragraph	couplet (2 lines), tercet (3), quatrain (4)
Rhyme scheme	The pattern of end rhymes, labeled with letters	**day / play / night / light** = AABB
Free verse	Poetry with no regular meter or rhyme scheme	Look at the line breaks instead.
Enjambment / caesura	A sentence runs past a line's end without a pause / a strong pause mid-line	Enjambment pulls you forward; a caesura stops you short.
Sound devices	Alliteration (repeated first consonants), assonance (repeated vowel sounds), onomatopoeia (sound words)	**wild wind whipped** · **the low, slow road** · **buzz, crack**
Get ahead: form and meter		
Meter, iambic pentameter	**Meter** is the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. An **iamb** is da-DUM (**a-WAY**); **iambic pentameter** is five per line. Unrhymed, it is **blank verse**.	**But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?** (*Romeo and Juliet*)
Shakespearean sonnet	14 lines: three quatrains and a couplet, ABAB CDCD EFEF GG	The Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* is one.
Petrarchan sonnet	14 lines: an octave (ABBAABBA) and a sestet (often CDECDE)	A problem in the octave, a response in the sestet
Volta	The "turn" in a sonnet: a shift in argument or tone	Line 9 in a Petrarchan sonnet; line 9 or the couplet in a Shakespearean one

Figurative language CORE

Comparisons and twists			*always explain what the comparison suggests*
simile	comparison with *like* or *as*: **steady as a metronome**	**metaphor**	comparison without them: **The hallway was a river.**
extended metaphor	a metaphor developed over many lines or a whole work	**personification**	human traits for a nonhuman thing: **The truck coughed.**
hyperbole	deliberate exaggeration: **a million times**	**understatement**	deliberate downplaying: a hurricane is **"a bit of rain"**
oxymoron	opposite words together: **"O brawling love! O loving hate!"** (*Romeo and Juliet*)	**paradox**	a seeming contradiction that holds a truth: **"I must be cruel only to be kind"** (*Hamlet*)
apostrophe	speaking to someone absent or to a thing: **"Death, be not proud"** (Donne)	**imagery**	language that appeals to the five senses

6 Words for Analysis

"Good," "bad," "sad," and "shows" do not say much. Precise words make your analysis precise, and AP readers notice. Learn ten new words from these tables this year.

Tone words CORE

Positive			*warm, admiring, light*
admiring	full of respect and approval	**nostalgic**	longing fondly for the past
earnest	sincere and serious in intent	**reverent**	deeply respectful, almost sacred
hopeful	expecting good things	**sympathetic**	sharing another's feelings
jubilant	triumphantly joyful	**whimsical**	fanciful, quirky, playful

Negative			*critical, angry, dark*
bitter	angry and hurt over a wrong	**indignant**	angry at something unjust
condescending	talking down to someone	**mocking**	making fun of with contempt
cynical	believing people act only from self-interest	**sardonic**	grimly or bitterly mocking
disdainful	looking down on something	**ominous**	suggesting something bad is coming

Neutral, serious, or mixed			*often the most accurate choice*
ambivalent	holding mixed feelings at once	**objective**	factual, without personal feeling
contemplative	quietly thinking something over	**solemn**	serious and dignified
detached	emotionally distant	**urgent**	pressing; demanding action now
matter-of-fact	plain, unemotional, practical	**wistful**	gently sad, longing for what is gone

Tone or mood?

Tone is the writer's or speaker's attitude. **Mood** is the feeling the reader gets. A calm tone can still create a terrifying mood.

Track the shift

Name both ends and the hinge: **The speaker's tone shifts from nostalgic to bitter when she returns to the empty house.**

Precise verbs to replace "shows" CORE

Analysis verbs			*the writer / the image / the repetition ...*
conveys	communicates an idea or feeling	**evokes**	calls up a feeling or memory
suggests / implies	hints at without saying directly	**reinforces**	strengthens an idea already present
emphasizes / underscores	gives special weight to	**juxtaposes**	places side by side for contrast
reveals	uncovers something hidden	**complicates**	adds a layer that makes it less simple
critiques	judges the faults of	**undermines**	weakens from within
satirizes	mocks to expose a flaw	**foreshadows**	hints at a later event

Academic phrases CORE

Introduce a claim	Through ..., the author suggests that ... · The writer argues that ... · Ultimately, the poem presents ...
Introduce evidence	When the narrator describes ... · Early in the speech, Douglass asks ... · The speaker calls her home "..."
Start commentary	This choice matters because ... · By doing so, ... · The word "..." carries connotations of ...
Concede and answer	Admittedly, ...; however, ... · While some argue that ..., ... · It is true that ..., but ...
Show complexity	On one hand ... on the other ... · This tension between ... and ... reveals ... · At first ... yet by the end ...

Swap weak words for strong ones

Instead of ... try ...			*pick the word that fits your meaning*
good	effective, vivid, compelling	**says**	argues, claims, admits, insists
bad	flawed, misleading, harmful	**talks about**	examines, explores, addresses
sad	somber, mournful, bleak	**a lot of**	many, frequent, repeated
very big	enormous, vast, sweeping	**thing**	name it: image, idea, detail, choice

7 Writing Toolkit

Every AP essay is an argument: about a text, a poem, or an issue. These building blocks work for all six essays.

A defensible thesis CORE

A strong thesis **answers the prompt**, makes a **claim someone could reasonably dispute**, and points toward a **line of reasoning**: the ordered steps your body paragraphs will take.

Weak	Problem	Strong
~~In "The Gift of the Magi," O. Henry uses irony.~~	Names a device; no claim about meaning	**Through the irony of two gifts made useless by the sacrifices that bought them, O. Henry suggests that love is measured by what we give up, not by what we receive.**
~~*Romeo and Juliet* is a play about two teenagers who fall in love.~~	A fact, not an argument	**Shakespeare presents the lovers' haste as both the source of their love's intensity and the cause of its destruction.**
~~Phones are a big issue in schools today.~~	No position to defend	**Schools should keep phones in lockers during class, because notifications fracture attention and real emergencies can go through the front office.**

A thesis pattern: **Although** [a point for the other side], [author or issue] [precise verb] [your claim] **because / through** [reason 1] **and** [reason 2].

Body paragraphs: claim, evidence, commentary CORE

Part	Job	Example (on Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart")
Claim	A topic sentence that supports one step of your thesis	**Poe's narrator undermines his own claim of sanity from the first sentence.**
Evidence	A short, specific, introduced quotation or detail	**He calls himself "very, very dreadfully nervous" and then demands, "why will you say that I am mad?"**
Commentary	Explains **how** the evidence proves the claim and **why** the author made the choice: two or three sentences per piece of evidence	**The stammering repetition reveals a mind already racing out of control. By protesting before anyone accuses him, he plants the very doubt he hopes to erase.**
Link	Ties the paragraph back to the thesis	**Poe thus teaches readers to distrust the narrator before the crime is even told.**

The commentary test

If a sentence could be written by someone who has not read the text, it is not commentary. Ask "How does this prove my claim?" and "Why would the author do this?" Then answer in your own words.

Embedding quotations CORE

Signal phrase + comma	As Lincoln says, "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here."
Sentence + colon	Lincoln names the goal: "a new birth of freedom."
Blend a phrase (best)	Lincoln asks his listeners to finish "the unfinished work."
Poetry line breaks	Mark with a slash: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate" (lines 1–2)

Openings and endings CORE

Introduction: short and specific

A sentence or two of context (author, title, situation), then your thesis. Skip "Since the dawn of time …"

Conclusion: one step further

Do not just repeat the thesis. Answer "So what?": why the choices matter, or what is at stake.

Transitions by purpose CORE

Add	also · furthermore · moreover · not only … but also	**Contrast**	however · yet · whereas · in contrast · instead
Concede	admittedly · granted · although · even though	**Cause and effect**	because · therefore · consequently · as a result
Example	for example · for instance · specifically · such as	**Emphasize**	indeed · in fact · above all · especially
Trace a text	at first · initially · then · later · by the end	**Compare**	similarly · likewise · in the same way · just as
Conclude	ultimately · in the end · taken together · in short		

Level up a sentence

Basic: The author uses imagery to show that the town is sad.

Better: The author's images of shuttered stores and empty streets create a bleak mood.

AP-ready: By lingering on shuttered storefronts and empty streets, the author evokes a town drained of life, which makes the single lit window in the final scene feel like a fragile act of hope.

Before you hand it in

- Does my thesis make an arguable claim that answers the prompt?
- Did I quote short, specific evidence instead of summarizing?
- Does every quotation get at least two sentences of commentary?
- Did I write about the text in the present tense?
- Did I cut "very," "a lot," and "shows"?

8 Grammar and Style

Clear sentences let readers see your thinking. The writing questions on the AP Lang exam ask how to revise drafts, so knowing how sentences work pays off directly.

Four sentence types CORE

Type	Structure	Example
Simple	One independent clause	**The bell rang.**
Compound	Two independent clauses: comma + FANBOYS, or a semicolon	**The bell rang, but nobody moved.**
Complex	An independent clause + a dependent clause	**When the bell rang, nobody moved.**
Compound-complex	Two or more independent clauses + at least one dependent clause	**When the bell rang, nobody moved, and the teacher smiled.**

FANBOYS = for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. Dependent clauses begin with words like because, although, when, while, if, since, and unless. Varying sentence types on purpose is a style choice AP readers notice.

Comma rules CORE

1. Before FANBOYS joining two full sentences: **I read it, but I skipped the film.**
2. After an introductory element: **After the storm, the town was silent.**
3. Around extra information: **My sister, who loves poetry, read it twice.**
4. In a series, including the last item (Oxford comma): **red, white, and blue**
5. After a signal phrase before a quotation: **She said, "Wait."**

Semicolon, colon, dash CORE

- **;** Joins two closely related full sentences, including before *however*: **The plan failed; however, we learned.**
- **:** After a **complete sentence**, introduces a list, an explanation, or a quotation: **She had one goal: to finish first.**
- **—** Sets off an emphatic interruption or turn: **The answer — and we knew it — was no.**

Sentence errors to fix CORE

Error	Not this	This
Fragment	~~Because the bus was late.~~	**Because the bus was late, I missed the quiz.**
Run-on	~~I wanted to go my parents said no.~~	**I wanted to go, but my parents said no.**
Comma splice	~~The book is long, I finished it fast.~~	**The book is long; I finished it fast.** (or a period, or **, but**)
Subject-verb agreement	~~The list of names were long.~~	**The list of names was long.** (the subject is *list*)
Pronoun agreement	~~The students handed in his essays.~~	**The students handed in their essays.**

Error	Not this	This
Unclear pronoun	~~Juliet tells the Nurse that she is worried.~~	**Juliet tells the Nurse, "I am worried."** (now we know who)
Faulty parallelism	~~She likes reading, writing, and to swim.~~	**She likes reading, writing, and swimming.**

MLA style and most teachers accept singular *they* for a person whose gender is unknown or who uses *they*: **Each student should bring their book.**

Active vs. passive voice

Active: **The committee approved the plan.** Passive: **The plan was approved.** Prefer active; it names who acted. Writers sometimes use passive to hide responsibility (**"Mistakes were made"**) — worth analyzing.

Literature lives in the present tense

Scout learns, not ~~Scout learned~~; **Lincoln argues**, when you discuss the text. Use past tense for history: **Lincoln spoke in 1863.**

MLA basics for quoting and citing CORE

Long works in *italics*	Novels, plays, books, films, newspapers: *Of Mice and Men*, *Romeo and Juliet*
Short works in "quotation marks"	Poems, short stories, articles, essays, songs: "The Tell-Tale Heart," "Nothing Gold Can Stay"
Prose: author and page	**"…" (Lee 39).** No comma, no "p.," and the period goes after the parentheses.
Poems: line numbers	**(lines 5–6)** the first time, then just **(7–8)**
Verse plays: act.scene.line	**(*Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.2)** = act 2, scene 2, line 2. Line numbers vary a little between editions. List every source on a final **Works Cited** page.

9 Skills for the AP Essays

You will not take an AP English exam this year, but you can practice a small version of every essay now. Three of them have a practice task in section 14.

Essay	What you do	Keys to a strong essay	Grade 9 version
AP English Language			
Synthesis	Read 6–7 short sources on one issue, often including a chart or image; argue a position using at least 3.	Your argument leads; sources support it. Never summarize them one by one. Cite as you go: **(Source C)**.	Read two short articles on one question; write a paragraph that uses both, naming each.
Rhetorical Analysis	Explain how a nonfiction writer's choices serve their purpose with their audience.	Start from the rhetorical situation. Track the writer's moves in order: **opens with … shifts to … ends by …**	One choice in a short speech: choice → effect → purpose. **Practice G.**

Essay	What you do	Keys to a strong essay	Grade 9 version
Argument	Take a position on an issue, using evidence from what you know.	Specific examples beat general ones. Nuance ("yes, but only when …") often beats an extreme. Answer a counterargument.	Keep an **evidence bank** of events, issues, and books. **Practice F.**
AP English Literature			
Poetry Analysis	Analyze how a poem's choices develop meaning, often about an idea the prompt names.	Read twice: first for what happens, then for choices and shifts. Thesis = interpretation + how.	TP-CASTT one poem a week. **Practice H.**
Prose Fiction Analysis	Analyze a passage from a novel or story, often about a character or relationship.	Analyze specific words and images; do not retell the plot.	A paragraph on how one passage characterizes someone.
Literary Argument	Answer an open question using a work of fiction you choose, from a list in the prompt or your own reading.	No text is printed for you: you must know your book well.	Start your book bank (below).

Start your book bank now

For every major work you read, keep one page: characters, a three-sentence plot, three key scenes, two short quotations, and two or three themes. By 12th grade you want five works you know deeply, ready for the literary argument essay.

Timing tips

- Three essays in two hours is about 40 minutes each. On AP Lang, use the 15-minute reading period for the sources.
- Plan for about 5 minutes: thesis, two or three claims, evidence for each.
- A finished essay with a clear thesis beats a beautiful half essay.
- The exam is typed: practice timed essays on a keyboard.

Multiple-choice strategies

- Read the whole passage actively before the questions.
- For a question about specific lines, reread a few lines before and after them.
- Eliminate answers that are too extreme, only partly true, or not in the text.
- There is no penalty for wrong answers: never leave one blank.

A 40-minute essay, minute by minute

0–5	**Plan**	Read the prompt twice, mark the task, sketch a thesis and claims.
5–35	**Write**	Intro with thesis, two or three body paragraphs, a short conclusion.
35–40	**Check**	Reread, fix errors, and add any missing transition or evidence.

10 Books and Texts Worth Knowing

AP readers do not expect any particular book, but knowing a few works deeply gives you evidence for the literary argument essay. Your class list will differ: read it closely, and add one or two of these on your own each year.

Work	What it is about	Themes
Often taught in 9th grade		
The Odyssey Homer · ancient Greek epic	After the Trojan War, Odysseus fights for ten years to get home to Ithaca and his wife, Penelope.	Perseverance, cleverness, hospitality, homecoming
Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare · c. 1595	Two young lovers from feuding families in Verona marry in secret; haste and hatred lead to tragedy.	Love and hate, fate, haste
To Kill a Mockingbird Harper Lee · 1960	In 1930s Alabama, Scout watches her father defend Tom Robinson, a Black man falsely accused of rape.	Justice and prejudice, empathy, growing up
Of Mice and Men John Steinbeck · 1937	Migrant workers George and Lennie dream of their own farm during the Great Depression.	Loneliness, dreams, friendship
Lord of the Flies William Golding · 1954	Schoolboys stranded on an island try to govern themselves, and order collapses into violence.	Civilization and savagery, power
Animal Farm George Orwell · 1945	Animals overthrow their farmer, and the pigs become the new tyrants: an allegory of the Russian Revolution.	Power and corruption, propaganda
Fahrenheit 451 Ray Bradbury · 1953	A fireman who burns books starts to question a society that trades thinking for entertainment.	Censorship, conformity, technology
The House on Mango Street Sandra Cisneros · 1984	Esperanza tells of growing up in a Latino neighborhood in Chicago, in short vignettes.	Identity, belonging, home
Night Elie Wiesel · memoir · 1960 (English)	Wiesel's account of surviving Auschwitz and Buchenwald as a teenager during the Holocaust.	Faith and doubt, silence, survival
Classic AP-ready novels		
Frankenstein Mary Shelley · 1818	A scientist creates a living being, then abandons it; the rejected creature turns to revenge.	Ambition, responsibility, isolation
Things Fall Apart Chinua Achebe · 1958	Okonkwo, a proud Igbo leader in Nigeria, resists change as British missionaries and rulers arrive.	Tradition and change, colonialism
The Great Gatsby F. Scott Fitzgerald · 1925	Nick Carraway watches the mysterious Jay Gatsby chase his lost love, Daisy, on 1920s Long Island.	The American Dream, wealth, illusion
Landmark nonfiction for AP Lang		
"What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" Frederick Douglass · 1852	Douglass turns a patriotic holiday into an indictment of slavery and of a nation that tolerates it.	Hypocrisy, freedom, justice
Gettysburg Address Abraham Lincoln · 1863	In under 300 words, Lincoln recasts the Civil War as a test of whether a nation built on equality can last.	Sacrifice, equality, democracy
Inaugural Address John F. Kennedy · 1961	A new president calls a new generation to service and to the defense of liberty during the Cold War.	Duty, freedom, sacrifice

Work	What it is about	Themes
“Letter from Birmingham Jail” Martin Luther King Jr. · 1963	From a jail cell, King answers clergymen who called the protests untimely and defends nonviolent action.	Justice, civil disobedience, urgency

Several of these works deal with violence, racism, and genocide. Read them with your teacher’s guidance, and talk about them — that is part of the point.

11 Mistakes to Avoid

Ninth graders make the same writing mistakes over and over. Fix these now and they will never cost you points.

Not this	This	Why
~~Then Romeo goes to the party and meets Juliet.~~	Shakespeare has the lovers’ first words form a shared sonnet, binding them in one poem.	Readers know the plot. Analyze; do not summarize.
~~The author uses a simile.~~	The simile comparing the crowd to a rising tide makes the protest feel unstoppable.	A label earns nothing; its effect does.
~~This quote shows that she is sad.~~	Her clipped, one-word replies suggest a grief she cannot yet name.	Point to the specific choice; use a precise verb. (The noun is “quotation.”)
~~Douglass uses many rhetorical devices to get his message across.~~	Douglass turns his audience’s holiday into an indictment, using irony to expose the gap between their ideals and slavery.	A thesis must be specific and arguable.
~~You can tell the narrator is lying.~~	The narrator’s contradictions reveal that he is lying.	“You” is vague and informal. Keep the focus on the text.
~~Scout learned that people are complicated.~~	Scout learns that people are complicated.	Literary present tense.
~~A four-line quotation standing alone as its own sentence.~~	A short phrase woven into your sentence, then two sentences of commentary.	Quote dumping. Readers score your thinking, not the author’s words.
~~In conclusion, the author uses imagery, diction, and syntax.~~	Ultimately, the essay suggests that …	A conclusion answers “So what?”; it does not repeat a list.
~~Poe is insane.~~	Poe’s narrator seems insane.	The narrator is not the author.
~~The ending is very, very sad.~~	The ending is devastating.	One precise word beats an intensifier.

Commonly confused words

Words	Remember	Example
its / it’s	*it’s* = it is or it has; *its* = belonging to it	It’s clear the novel has its flaws.
their / there / they’re	belonging to them / a place / they are	They’re leaving their bags there.

Words	Remember	Example
affect / effect	usually: *affect* is the verb, *effect* the noun	The image affects us; its effect is eerie.
than / then	*than* compares; *then* is about time	She read more than I did, then wrote.
who / whom	*who* = he or she (subject); *whom* = him or her (object)	Who wrote it? To whom was it written?
allusion / illusion	a reference / a false appearance	The allusion to Eden suggests a lost paradise.
fewer / less	*fewer* for things you count; *less* for amounts	fewer pages, less time

12 Study Plan and Resources

Twenty minutes a day beats two hours on Sunday. Here is a routine that fits around homework, practice, and work.

When	What to do	Time
Every day	Read anything you choose · annotate one page or copy one sentence you admire · add one word to your notebook	20–30 min
Every week	Write one claim–evidence–commentary paragraph about something you read · read one opinion article and name its claim and one rhetorical choice · review your mistakes notebook	About 1 hr total
Every month	One timed paragraph or short essay on an AP-style prompt · score it with the rubric in section 2 · TP-CASTT one poem	45 min
Summer	Read two or three books: one classic, one nonfiction, one just for fun · keep a reading journal · start your book bank	A little, often

Free and widely used resources

Reading

- **Project Gutenberg** (gutenberg.org) — free public-domain books, from *Frankenstein* to Douglass's *Narrative*.
- **Poetry Foundation** (poetryfoundation.org) — thousands of poems, poet biographies, and a glossary of terms.
- **CommonLit** (commonlit.org) — free reading passages with questions, sorted by grade.
- **Your school or public library** — with a library card, the Libby app lends e-books and audiobooks free.

Writing and the exams

- **AP Central** (apcentral.collegeboard.org) — course descriptions, past free-response questions, scoring guidelines, and sample essays.
- **AP Classroom** — practice your teacher assigns once you are in an AP class.
- **Purdue OWL** (owl.purdue.edu) — clear guides to grammar, MLA style, and essay writing.
- **The Learning Network** (The New York Times) — daily student writing prompts and contests.

Make reading part of your life, not just homework

- Keep a book with you — on your phone through Libby, if not in your bag. Audiobooks count too.
- Read one opinion column a week and ask: what is the claim, and do I agree?
- Keep a "commonplace book": copy sentences you love and note why they work.

13 End-of-Year Self-Check

Check off each statement when it is true for you. Anything unchecked in June is your summer goal.

Reading

- [ ] I read for at least 20 minutes most days.
- [ ] I annotate with a purpose and a code.
- [ ] I can sum up a passage in one sentence.
- [ ] I can use SOAPSTone and TP-CASTT.
- [ ] I can figure out a new word from context.

Analysis

- [ ] I can identify a writer's purpose and audience.
- [ ] I can explain the effect of ten devices.
- [ ] I can state a theme in a full sentence.
- [ ] I can name a tone precisely and spot shifts.
- [ ] I keep the narrator separate from the author.

Speaking and listening

- [ ] I use text evidence in class discussion.
- [ ] I build on or challenge classmates' ideas.
- [ ] I can give a two-minute talk with a clear claim.
- [ ] I can identify the main claim of a speech I hear.

Writing

- [ ] I can write a defensible thesis.
- [ ] I can write a claim–evidence–commentary paragraph.
- [ ] My commentary explains how and why.
- [ ] I embed and cite short quotations.
- [ ] I can answer a counterargument.
- [ ] I can write a focused paragraph in 20 minutes.

Grammar

- [ ] I can write all four sentence types on purpose.
- [ ] I avoid fragments, run-ons, and splices.
- [ ] I use semicolons and colons correctly.
- [ ] I write about literature in the present tense.
- [ ] I format titles in *italics* or "quotation marks."

14 Practice

Answers and model responses are in section 15. Try everything first without looking.

A. Name the device

Choose from: alliteration, allusion, anaphora, hyperbole, juxtaposition, metaphor, oxymoron, personification, rhetorical question, simile.

1. _____ The classroom was a zoo after the fire drill.
2. _____ The old truck coughed and wheezed up the hill.
3. _____ We will not wait. We will not whisper. We will not back down.
4. _____ I've walked a thousand miles today.
5. _____ Who doesn't want to be treated with respect?
6. _____ A deafening silence filled the gym.
7. _____ Like a lighthouse in fog, her advice kept me off the rocks.
8. _____ Inside, the party glittered; outside, a boy shivered in the snow.
9. _____ Six slippery snails slid silently seaward.
10. _____ After that loss, the coach knew he had met his Waterloo.

B. Weak or strong thesis?

Write W or S. Then rewrite one weak thesis as a strong one.

1. _____ In "The Gift of the Magi," O. Henry uses irony.
2. _____ Golding's island suggests that civilization is only a thin layer over human cruelty.
3. _____ Social media has both good and bad effects.
4. _____ Cities should trade some parking for bike lanes, because bike lanes make streets safer.
5. _____ *Romeo and Juliet* is a play by William Shakespeare about two young lovers.

My rewrite:

C. Circle the precise tone

1. A eulogy praising a teacher's lifetime of quiet devotion.
   A. sardonic B. reverent C. detached D. whimsical
2. A review that says, "Oh, wonderful — another sequel nobody asked for."
   A. earnest B. nostalgic C. sardonic D. reverent
3. A grandmother describing the summers of her childhood, which she misses.
   A. nostalgic B. indignant C. objective D. mocking
4. A letter demanding that the city fix a dangerous crosswalk before someone is hurt.
   A. whimsical B. contemplative C. urgent D. condescending
5. A speaker who admires a city's energy but fears what it costs its people.
   A. jubilant B. ambivalent C. cynical D. playful

D. Fix the sentence

Name the error (fragment, run-on, comma splice, agreement, parallelism, or tense), then rewrite the sentence correctly.

1. Because the bus was late.
   Error: _____
2. The novel is long, I finished it in two days.
   Error: _____
3. The box of old letters were in the attic.
   Error: _____
4. We ran out of time we never finished.
   Error: _____
5. The coach told us to stretch, to hydrate, and that we should rest.
   Error: _____
6. Neither the coach nor the players was ready.
   Error: _____
7. In the poem, the speaker remembered his father's hands.
   Error: _____

E. Level up a sentence

Rewrite each sentence at the AP-ready level: name a specific choice, use a precise verb, and explain its effect (section 7).

1. Shakespeare uses a lot of oxymorons to show that Romeo is confused about love.
2. The principal's speech was good because it used pathos.

F. Argument paragraph — mini AP Lang essay 3

Some school districts in the United States have moved to a four-day school week with longer days. **Should your school do the same?** Write about 150 words: state a defensible claim, give two reasons with specific evidence, answer one counterargument, and end with a sentence that explains why it matters. Use at least three transitions from section 7.

Plan first (5 minutes):

My claim

The other side says …

Reason 1 + evidence

My answer to it

Reason 2 + evidence

Why it matters

G. Rhetorical analysis — mini AP Lang essay 2

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, delivered November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, months after the battle there. Text: the Bliss copy.

Step 1. Fill in SOAPSTone.

Speaker: _____ Purpose: _____

Occasion: _____ Subject: _____

Audience: _____ Tone: _____

Step 2. In about 150 words, analyze how Lincoln uses one or two rhetorical choices — for example, repetition, contrast, or the shift from past to future — to move his audience from mourning to commitment.

H. Poetry analysis — mini AP Lit essay 1

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

Robert Frost, 1923

1. Paraphrase lines 1–4 in your own words.

2. What does "gold" suggest that "green" does not?

3. Where does the poem's focus widen, and to what?

4. State the theme in a full sentence.

Write: In about 150 words, analyze how Frost uses imagery and allusion to develop the poem's idea about change. Cite line numbers.

15 Answer Key

For the open-ended tasks there are many correct answers; the models show one strong way to do it.

A. Name the device

1	**metaphor**
2	**personification**
3	**anaphora**
4	**hyperbole**
5	**rhetorical question**
6	**oxymoron**
7	**simile**
8	**juxtaposition**
9	**alliteration**
10	**allusion** (Napoleon's final defeat)

B. Thesis

1	**W** (a device, no claim)
2	**S**
3	**W** (no one would disagree)
4	**S**
5	**W** (a fact)

C. Precise tone

1	**B reverent**
2	**C sardonic**
3	**A nostalgic**
4	**C urgent**
5	**B ambivalent**

B. Sample rewrite of 3

> Although social media helps teenagers stay connected, schools should teach students to limit it, because constant comparison online erodes confidence and steals sleep.

G. SOAPSTone

S	**Lincoln, the wartime president**
O	**Dedicating a soldiers' cemetery**
A	**The crowd, then the nation**
P	**Honor the dead; commit the living**
S	**What the sacrifice means**
T	**Solemn, reverent, resolute**

D. Fix the sentence (other correct fixes are possible)

1	**Fragment** → Because the bus was late, I missed first period.
2	**Comma splice** → The novel is long, but I finished it in two days.
3	**Agreement** → The box of old letters was in the attic. (The subject is "box.")
4	**Run-on** → We ran out of time, so we never finished.
5	**Parallelism** → The coach told us to stretch, to hydrate, and to rest.
6	**Agreement** → Neither the coach nor the players were ready. (With "neither … nor," the verb agrees with the nearer subject.)
7	**Tense** → In the poem, the speaker remembers his father's hands. (Literary present.)

E. Level up (sample answers)

1	**Romeo's string of oxymorons, such as "brawling love" and "loving hate," captures a mind pulled in opposite directions, suggesting that his early love is more confusion than passion.**
2	**By opening with the story of a freshman who almost dropped out, the principal turns a statistic into a face, moving parents to support the new tutoring program.**

F. Model argument paragraph

Our school should keep its five-day week, because a four-day schedule would save less than it costs students. Supporters argue that a day off would cut busing and utility bills and give students time to rest. Those savings are real, but they are limited: teachers still need to be paid, and most of the building's costs do not disappear for one day. Meanwhile, longer days would push classes deep into the afternoon, when attention fades, so students might gain a day off but lose focus on the other four. Furthermore, the empty fifth day would fall hardest on families who cannot afford child care and on students who count on school breakfast and lunch. Ultimately, a school calendar is a statement about who comes first, and that statement should put students' learning ahead of the budget.

Why it works: a clear, defensible claim · the counterargument is stated fairly, then answered · two specific reasons (attention, families) · transitions: meanwhile, furthermore, ultimately · the last sentence answers "So what?" An equally strong paragraph could argue for the four-day week.

G. Model rhetorical analysis paragraph

Lincoln transforms a ceremony of mourning into a call to action by shifting the work of dedication from the ground to the listeners. He begins by admitting the limits of the occasion: "we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground." The repeated "we can not," broken by dashes, slows the sentence into a series of bowed heads, conceding that no speech can match what the soldiers did. Yet this humility is strategic. Having declared the ground already consecrated, Lincoln turns to what the living can still do: "It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work." By moving the verb "dedicate" from the field to the audience, he makes every listener responsible for finishing the war. The closing phrase, "of the people, by the people, for the people," then gives that work a purpose larger than one battle: the survival of self-government itself.

Why it works: the topic sentence names what Lincoln does and why · short, embedded quotations · commentary explains how (repetition, dashes) and why (to make the audience responsible) · traces the speech from start to finish · precise verbs: transforms, conceding, declared.

H. Poetry questions

1	**Paraphrase** — Spring's first growth looks golden, a color nature can hardly keep. The first leaf is as lovely as a flower, but only briefly.
2	**"Gold"** — value, rarity, perfection. Calling ordinary green "gold" makes the beginning the most precious stage.
3	**Lines 6–7** — from one leaf to human history (Eden) and a whole day, so the loss becomes universal.
4	**Theme** — Beauty and innocence are most precious at their beginning, and they cannot last.

H. Model poetry analysis paragraph

In “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” Frost uses compressed images of a season and a single day to suggest that every beginning is precious precisely because it cannot last. The poem opens with a seeming contradiction: “Nature’s first green is gold” (line 1). By calling the plainest sign of spring “gold,” Frost gives new growth the value of something rare, and the alliteration of “hardest hue to hold” (2) makes the line feel like a grip slipping. The poem then widens its view. The allusion in “So Eden sank to grief” (6) links a fading leaf to humanity’s fall from paradise, suggesting that loss is not only natural but part of the human story. When “dawn goes down to day” (7), even the brightest hour fades into the ordinary, and the final line states the theme in four plain words. Frost’s brevity mirrors his subject: the poem, like the golden leaf, is over almost as soon as it begins.

Why it works: a thesis that interprets, not just identifies · each quotation is short and cited by line · commentary explains connotation (gold), sound (alliteration), and allusion (Eden) · the last sentence connects form to meaning — a step toward sophistication.

> **Keep reading, keep writing**
>
> By 11th grade, the AP English exams will feel like the next step, not a leap. Read widely, talk about what you read, and write until your thinking is exact — as Bacon put it, reading makes a full mind, conversation a ready one, and writing an exact one.