

## AP English Language and Composition Course Syllabus

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**Course Objectives:** The objectives of this course are to develop what Philosopher Cornel West has called a “critical disposition” by means of the study of logic and philosophical inquiry, to enhance and further develop our abilities to read critically and analyze rhetorically a range of difficult non-fiction texts, and to make logical and compelling arguments, both verbally and in writing. Another of our primary objectives is to increase our cultural capital – that is, to expose ourselves to a wider and wider range of texts, which would include music, literature, film, economics, etc. – in order to gain access to what Robert Scholes has called “a usable cultural past”. If we are even moderately successful in reaching these objectives, then we will be very well-prepared for the AP Test in May.

**Writing:** We write one in-class essay most weeks. Every three weeks, each student chooses the best essay that she or he has written during that three week period for grading. This allows us to get a lot of practice with timed writing on a wide range of prompts while simultaneously lowering the pressure associated with each essay, since everyone has three essays from which to choose prior to grading.

**Readings:** We read non-fiction writings addressing such topics as philosophy, art and literary criticism, economics, politics, current events, and cultural studies (i.e. gender and ethnic studies, etc.). Most of the readings are essays written by some of the best writers and thinkers in history, which provides us with many excellent models of the sort of writing that we as students are consistently asked to produce – essays. Furthermore, this approach prepares us for sort of reading we’ll be expected to do at the college-level in classes other than English (i.e. history, political science, sociology, psychology, philosophy of science, etc.). Reading quizzes are employed to keep us all honest.

**Discussion:** The course follows a discussion-based format. Many days consist of class/small group conversations exploring the texts we have read together.

**Homework:** For this class, homework primarily consists of assigned readings, memorizing specified rhetorical terms and logical concepts, preparing for vocabulary tests (occurring every two weeks or so), and independent study and practice aimed toward improving our writing. Very few assignments are collected. We try to treat our students, as much as possible, like college students, since with a passing score on the AP Test, they will likely receive college credit. Last year, many students reported spending between 3-5 hours on homework **most weeks**, but of course this varies widely from student to student. Ask around.

**Summer Assignment:** This consists of reading 15 essays, the book *They Say, I Say*, and memorizing 25 rhetorical terms.

**Grades and Pass-Rates:** There is no extra credit. The class is not easy, but it is not designed to be terribly difficult either. A lot will depend on your reading ability, willingness to put real effort into improving your writing, and participation in class conversations. Generally speaking, our pass-rates on the AP Test are about 20% higher than the national average, usually coming in at between 80-100% (judging from the last 6 or so years).