**The Ultimate List of AP English Literature Tips**

The AP English Literature and Composition exam is designed to test your ability to think critically and analyze literary excerpts. The test is three hours long and consists of a multiple-choice portion (worth 45% of your grade) and an essay portion (worth 55% of your grade). Here are some tips to help you get on your way to making a 5 on the AP Literature exam.

**AP Literature Course Study Tips**

Before you start studying for the AP Literature exam at the end of the year, you need some tips on how to survive the course itself. Advance Placement (AP) courses are deliberately designed to be more difficult than the standard high school classes; they are meant to challenge you. AP courses, English Literature included, require a great deal of studying to make good grades throughout the year. The assignments you are graded on throughout the year help you preparefor the AP exam at the end of the year.

Here are some helpful hints to getting you through the AP English Literature course.

**1. Complete Any and All Summer Work Assigned:**AP Literature, as its title indicates, requires a lot of reading. Chances are, your teacher will provide you with a reading list and expect the required titles to be read when you walk into your first day of class. In some cases, you may even be assigned a report or project to be completed before you begin the class. This is more for the teacher to view what literary skills you already possess and what skills will need to be taught to you. However, this doesn’t mean you should take the work assigned lightly. If you take it seriously and complete a proficient assignment, it will show your teacher that you are in the course to learn. This attitude will make the school year a lot more bearable for both you and your instructor.

**2. Go to Class:**Missing class leads to missing material. Missing material leads to lower scores on assignments. Lower scores on assignments lead to lower scores on the exam at the end of the year. The bottom line is: don’t miss class if you can help it.

**3. Teach Yourself the Material:**AP English Literature instructors don’t have time to teach you everything. Since you are probably only in their presence for an hour or two, they have learned to prioritize the material they have to teach. Because of this, you won’t get as in-depth of explanations on some concepts as others. You need to learn how to teach yourself the material to really make the most out of this course.

You can really get creative with this. You can teach yourself by conducting good old fashioned research, or just by reading the assigned texts. Or, you can expand your knowledge a little more. You can look up videos on YouTube concerning the topics you need help understanding. You can also use [Learnerator](http://www.learnerator.com/course-library) to test yourself on different areas covered in a typical AP English Literature class.

**4. Learn How to Analyze Text:**Analyzing literary text is an incredibly large portion of the AP English Literature course. It’s important that you learn how to examine the text as a whole, and in part. Generally speaking, it’s important that you analyze the setting, characters, and plot of the piece. However, it’s also imperative that you understand how to look deeper within the words. Deconstruct the text and examine its theme, look for literary devices, and motives.

**5. Read:**This is literature! Therefore, you should be getting a good amount of reading done. This does not necessarily mean that you have to aim to read an outrageous number of books or anything. You just need to at least make an attempt to read every day. As you read, try to dissect the depth of the text. After a few days of this, you’ll be surprised at how easy analysis can come to you once you train your mind to question everything.

**6. Ask Questions:**Your teacher is there to help; it’s their job. If there’s anything you don’t understand, be sure to ask your instructor. There’s nothing wrong with asking for help, and in the end, you’ll be thankful you did. Understanding a concept you previously had trouble with is sure to be a huge weight off of your shoulders.

**7. Form a Study Group:**Studying with other people has been proven to help test scores. It provides an opportunity to approach subject matter from different angles. Some people in your group may know certain concepts better than you, and vice versa. One of the best ways to make sure you know the material is to teach it to others.

**8. Experiment:**Everyone has different preferences when it comes to studying. Maybe you’re a visual learner. Perhaps you like to listen to material to really understand it. The best way to find out what form of studying helps you best is to experiment. Try different methods to see what works best for you. Plus, keeping a variety in your study routine helps keep boredom at bay.

Now that you have a grasp on how to get through the actual coursework of your AP English Literature and Composition class, it’s time to learn how to study for the exam at the end of the year.

First, we’ll take a look at some tips that are sure to help you ace the first portion of the AP Literature exam: the multiple-choice section. This portion is worth 45% of your total score and it consists of several passages to read and 55 questions to answer, which you have exactly one hour to complete.

Let’s get started.

**AP English Literature Multiple-choice Tips**

**1. First, Read the Passages:**Yes, you read that correctly. It’s a common misconception that you should read the questions before reading the passage, so you can work quickly and scan the text for the correct answer. One vital thing to remember is this: quicker isn’t always better. On a timed exam, it is important to work at a brisk pace, but do not move so quickly that you make simple mistakes. It’s best to read the passages before even glancing at the questions because it prevents error. By merely scanning the passage for the answers, you’re missing out on a plethora of content that could be vital to answering questions correctly later on in the test.

**2. Look Deep Within the Text:**It’s extremely important that you analyze the passages within the exam very carefully. Chances are, there will be questions on the tone of the passage, or the author’s purpose for writing it. Was it to inform or persuade the audience? Perhaps the author used some literary devices like allusions or irony. Closely read the passages and you will have no problem identifying the answers to questions that are specific to the literature side of AP English.

**3. Carefully Read the Questions:**If you don’t understand what the question is asking, you can’t possibly expect to know the answer. Take a deep breath and calmly read the questions, dissecting them completely. This will be easier to do for some questions than for others. Once you understand what it is exactly the question is asking, try to recall where in the passage the answer could be located. Also be sure to read the question in its entirety. Sometimes, the writers of the test will throw in certain words or phrases that lead the question in a different direction. For example, the words “EXCEPT” and “NOT” are often used at the end of questions, and this can confuse you. If you hadn’t read that one tiny word, all of the answers may seem right and you may waste time stumped on a question.

**4. Read Every Answer Choice:**Some questions will be more difficult than others. Some questions are even designed to trip you up. Be sure to read every single word in every single answer choice; sometimes one word can make all the difference as to whether or not an answer is correct.

**5. Reread Parts of the Passage:**If time permits, reread the parts of the text in which answers are located. Be sure the information matches one of the answer choices. You may even want to put a star, dash, or some other marking beside portions of the text that contain answers. That way, if you have extra time at the end of the test, you can go back and check your answers more quickly.

**6. Use Your Time Wisely:**This is a timed exam. 60 minutes to complete 55 questions. This allows for an average of a minute per question, with some leftover time to account for reading passages. You have absolutely no time to sit at your desk staring blankly at questions you don’t quite understand. Luckily, there is no penalty for answers marked wrong—or answers not marked at all—on the AP English Literature exam. This means you should definitely skip the questions you’re unsure of. Mark them in some sort of way so that it is noticeable that you haven’t answered them yet. Then, if you have some time at the end of the test, you can go back and see if you can come up with the answer. Alternatively, if you can’t seem to find an answer: guess! Remember, you’re only graded on the number of questions you get right; there’s absolutely no penalty for getting a question wrong.

**7. Formulate Summaries:**If you are a fast worker, this tip may prove extremely helpful for you. A few of the multiple-choice questions may test your overall comprehension of the passages you read. In the margins of the page beside the passage, jot down a few bullet points outlining the plot progression. This way you can refer back to your notes when answering questions rather than searching the entire text.

**8. Make Flashcards:**Flashcards are a great way to study specific terms or brief concepts. Since you will be tested on your understanding of certain terms, it is important that you know them like the back of your hand. Try making flashcards of different literary devices and review them periodically throughout the semester.

**9. Study Everywhere:**This may seem a bit extreme, but it really helps. Take the flashcards you’ve made with you wherever you go. Keep them in your wallet, in your purse, or even in your car. Whenever you have a moment of free time, instead of scrolling through Twitter or Facebook on your phone, run through a review of your terms. It’ll stick better in your memory and help your AP Literature exam score in the long run.

**10. Test Yourself:**The most helpful and effective way to prepare for the multiple-choice portion of the AP English Literature exam is by testing yourself. Prepare early in the semester for the exam. Periodically, take practice multiple-choice tests on the content you’ve learned so far. There are several websites out there dedicated to helping you quiz yourself for the AP Literature exam. One of these is [com](http://www.learnerator.com/), which allows you to test your abilities on nearly every concept covered in the AP English Literature course.

**11. Don’t Stress It:**The AP English Literature exam is one big test. Sure, it affects the amount of college credit you receive coming out of high school. But at the end of the day, it’s just a test. Anxiety and stress can severely affect your ability to function correctly. Over time, it can even start to have negative effects on your mind and body. Some people even develop anxiety disorders. Just remember, your mental health is more important than your grades. Take a deep breath periodically throughout the test. It’ll help calm your body and soothe your mind so you can concentrate better.

Now that you have some tips on how to tackle the multiple-choice portion of the AP English Literature exam, it’s time to focus on the most challenging part: the free response portion. In this portion, you have two hours to complete three essays. This section tests your ability to analyze passages and dissect them to form logical interpretations to be illustrated in your essays.

**AP English Literature Free Response Portion Tips**

**1. Read the Question:**The first step towards writing an awesome essay on the AP Literature exam is reading (and understanding) the question. What are the authors of the test asking for specifically? The answer to this question is the key to writing a well-rounded essay. The scorers of the free response portion want essays that are clear and straight to the point. Simply restating the prompt will result in a huge deduction of points. Regurgitating the question will show the reader that you may not be confident in your ability to dissect passages. This is an extremely bad impression to give, since the interpretation of text is the basis of the entire course.

**2. Come Up with a Thesis:**A well-written thesis is the basis of all successful essays. As mentioned previously, do NOT restate the question. Come up with your own unique topic sentence to answer the question. Make it brief and to the point. You have the rest of the essay to elaborate on your thesis; that will be your body.

**3. Stay Organized:**Organization is key to writing a great essay. Prepare an outline within the first few minutes of writing your essay. Perhaps even use a diagram, if you’re a visual learner. A clear and precise outline can help prevent rambling when answering the question in your essay.

**4. Use a High-Level Vocabulary:**Since this is an exam for an Advanced Placement English course, it is imperative that you use a vocabulary that reflects a higher level of education. However, be sure that you use your impressive vocabulary in context. Nothing looks worse than using a word incorrectly in your essay. Be careful: only use words in which you know the definition.

**5. Use Your Resources:**On the first two essays, you will be asked to read a passage and analyze it according to the instructions given in the question. Use the passage to your advantage. Frequently refer back to specific parts of the text. This will show the readers that you paid very close attention to detail when reading the passage. The specific references display the ability to close read, which is a skill covered frequently in an AP English Literature course.

**6. Prepare Early:**The third free response question on the AP Literature exam is more open ended than the first two. You will be asked a question and you will be given the opportunity to answer it pertaining to a work of literature that you have read in class. It’s important that you keep this particular essay question in mind as you work throughout the semester. If a particular work of literature stands out to you, prepare early to choose this as the piece to write about in your third essay.

**7. Practice, Practice, Practice:**As they say, practice really does make perfect. A good option for practicing free response questions involves searching the Internet for old exam rubrics. These show you exactly what the scorers are looking for in an essay. [The AP Literature section of AP Central](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/courses/teachers_corner/2124.html), a website created by the College Board to help with studying for exams, has several practice exams for your use. Take advantage of this and practice writing essays using different prompts from previous exams.

**8. Use a Good Writing Utensil:**Nothing is worse than getting halfway through an essay and having your pen run out of ink, or your pencil getting smudged. Often, readers prefer the look and clarity of black ink to colored ink or the graphite of pencil. Take that into mind when going into the free response portion of the exam.

**9. Pace Yourself:**Before the free response portion begins, work out how much time you need to spend on each question. It may even be helpful to bring a watch to time yourself on each essay. You need to give yourself ample time to complete each question. However, you also need to be sure that you are not rushing through the questions and leaving vital information out of your essays.

**10. Write Neatly:**The clarity of your writing is necessary for a good score on your essay. If the reader cannot decipher your chicken scratch, how can they possibly score it?

**11. Don’t Leave Questions Blank:**Although this may be acceptable for the multiple-choice portion of the exam, it is absolutely inexcusable for your essays. You only get three chances to prove your competency in the free response portion. Take advantage of this opportunity to show the readers how much you’ve learned from taking this AP course.

**12. Understand What the Readers are Looking For:**As we said earlier, rubrics are a great resource to use when preparing for the AP Literature exam. They reflect exactly how your essay will be scored. It’s vital to understand exactly what the readers are looking for in a good essay. This includes:

**a) Plot comprehension:**Whether or not you understand what is happening in the passages given to you to read. Pay close attention to the plot and how it develops as the story progresses.

**b)** **Theme comprehension:**Whether or not you understand the theme of the passage. The theme is the dominating central idea in a work. It’s vital that you recognize the theme very early on in your essay.

**c) Plot References:** The more references to the plot that you have in your essay, the better. However, this does not mean restate the entire storyline. This will bore the reader and make it seem like you are dancing around the question. Scorers like for you to be very clear and to the point in your essays.

**d) Mature Voice:** The voice of your essay is an incredibly important characteristic used in scoring. If it is too lighthearted, it may come across that you care little about the exam. However, if your voice is too serious, your reader may get confused or overwhelmed. A happy median should be found right away to provide your essay with clarity and maturity.

**13. Listen to Your Teacher:**This is perhaps the most important of all the free response tips. Over the course of the semester, your teacher will provide you with ample advice for the exam. Pay close attention to your teacher’s guidance. If the information your teacher gives you wasn’t relevant, they wouldn’t waste their time giving it to you. Your instructor knows the exam; it’s only logical to follow their advice.

The AP English Literature and Composition exam is all about analysis of different literary works. Hopefully these tips will help you tackle this massive exam with ease.

Do you have any more tips for the AP Literature exam? Let us know!

**Tips Submitted by AP English Literature Teachers**

**1. Always remember the author's purpose.** Retelling what happened in the story is not an analysis. You must understand and relay why the author wrote it the way he/she did and what he/she is trying to tell readers!

**2. Be original.** Think about the fact that the AP Test readers have been looking at essays on the same topics for three days. What will you do to be original and stand out that will surprise the reader at 4:30 pm on day three? Brainstorm what everyone else will say before writing. Then, don't write on those topics.

**3. “Box the but because shift happens.”** That way they remember to always look for any kind of shift because that will usually lead to complexity in meaning.

**4. Answer the question as it is actually asked.** It's easy to see a title or an author and jump to conclusions, and sometimes that means students are writing about what they think the question is asking instead of what the question actually is asking. In the pressure to complete three essays in 120 minutes, it's an easy mistake to make ... and a good one to avoid!

**5. Answer the question in the introduction.**

**6. Focused writing on two or three aspects of the text (characterization, use of devices, etc) accompanied with analysis will generate a higher score than lightly touching on 5 to 7 aspects.** As a reader we are happy that you can identify techniques, but what we are looking for is analysis.

**7. Always answer the question: "So What?"**Yes, the writer used an extended metaphor, so what? Why did they chose that metaphor? How does that choice reflect the author's intent? What effect does it create within the text and within the reader? Provide the reader with the "so what" to help drive your analysis deeper.

**8. Brush up on your vocabulary** - if you don't understand the vocabulary used in the questions and/or answers, you will not be able to find the correct answer. There are many words with multiple meanings / nuances of meaning that will bring you to the wrong conclusion. Pay attention to the wording of the questions and answers!

**9. Students who read widely and regularly are far more prepared** to write and communicate clearly with a deeper understanding than students who do not read. Reading expands knowledge, vocabulary usage and comprehension and enables students to make connections within and between content areas which real world applications.

**10. Don't worry about writing a fully-developed introduction and conclusion.** Instead, use your time to focus on meaning. What important insights do you have to share? Make sure you provide much more analysis than plot summary. Begin with a clear thesis and end with one strong concluding statement.

**11. Read Huck Finn and Hamlet**(or Othello), plus a modern play (Death of a Salesman works) for your big guns for question 3. **Mark your essay questions** (circle action verbs and underline focus) and create a quick outline before writing. The time spent will prevent the heartache of not addressing the prompt.

**12. Each essay is worth the same amount of points, but one is set for you to shine** -- know three books really well so that you can rock the free-response essay. On the test - do it first while your mind is still fresh.

**13. Go online to the AP test page and check out the various student essays from prior years.** What makes an essay a 9? 7? or even a 4? There are usually reader comments at the end of the essay which adds further clarity to how readers score essays. Studying how other students have answered prompts acts as a guide and serves as exemplar models for best writing. Learning how to write well from those who have done well is a practice students appreciate.

**14. Find a good literary timeline to conceptualize what you read in terms of the art movement and historical time period.** These can provide insight into the texts as well as help you remember what you have read.

**15. Have four novels of literary quality and one play that the student is comfortable analyzing so no question #3 can stump the student.**

**16. For all poetry: a. analyze the central purpose, b. explain the speaker's attitude toward the subject, c. Analyze any figurative language.**

**17. Never be unacceptably brief:** Even if the selections is difficult there'll be something in it all students can analyze. Analyze that and then keep writing!

**18. Learn and practice using the language and function of literature, poetry, and rhetoric.**Plan and execute their usage in your style, syntax, and art, and use the language when critiquing in workshops and discussing classics.

**19. Do not merely skim to point out literary devices.** (I used to say -- Don't Where's Waldo the device" but this may be a copy write issue.) Zoom deep into the text to identify the device, explain in detail how the device is functioning and then zoom out to explain how it works to support the passage as a whole and how it connects to the universal human condition. This means the difference between writing a college level paper and writing a high school level paper. Thanks for the tip from Jodi G. from Saugus High.

**20. Deconstruct the prompt** - make sure you understand exactly what it is asking you to do - then use it as a focus for your annotation of the text on Q1 and Q2 and as a launching point for your notes and thesis for Q3.

**21. Focus on two primary ideas (literary devices, elements of composition, etc...) for each essay in order to go deeper in analysis of each.** Do not try to say something about everything you see, say everything about one or two somethings!.

**22. Take 10-12 minutes to read and deconstruct the prompt, annotate the poem or passage and develop a thesis before you begin writing the essay.** That thinking and planning time will help you remain focused which will ensure that your essay is clear and cohesive.

**23. Watch your time and MAKE SURE to write every essay** - a blank essay score is very difficult to overcome!

**24. Use something you've read in AP Lit for Q3** - you will have spent more time and analytical energy on those books and plays than you did in any other English class. Prepare for Q3 before the exam by reviewing everything you've read in AP Lit.

**25. Pick two texts, one classic and one modern, get to know them backward and forward as well as the historical context around them.**

**26. Address all aspects of the prompt! Look for complexity!**

**27. Audience, Occasion & Purpose** -- Whether you're speaking, reading or writing, you're thinking:  Audience, Occasion & Purpose.

**28. Turn your words into pictures and your pictures into words.**  Meaning: If you have an idea, anchor it to something concrete. If you have something concrete, associate it with an idea.

**29. When writing essays, always tie your thoughts to the text (embed quotes)!**Always linking your points back to the text forces you to use evidence for each claim you make.

**30. Analyze not summarize!**

**31. Debate the questions.**  Get students to debate the answers to AP multiple choice questions without your help. After they "quiz" on a passage and the questions for it, ask them how they think they did. The answer is always mixed, so give them an option: Keep the score they currently have OR discuss the answers in a large group without teacher's help and take that community grade. They always pick the latter. Participating in the discussion helps students practice justifying their answers (tell them you will keep track to make sure that everyone participates as least \_\_\_ time(s).) As you observe their process,  you will gain all kinds of insight into students' thinking process, they will learn from the ways their classmates explain their choices, and their scores are almost always 100!