

# CHAPTER 5

## Introduction to the Analysis Essay

### IN THIS CHAPTER

**Summary:** Complete explanation of the analysis essay and its purpose as it is presented on the AP English Language exam.



### Key Ideas

- ★ Learn the types of analysis prompts you might encounter on the AP English Language exam.
- ★ Learn about the rubrics and rating of the AP English Language essay.
- ★ Learn the basics of reading and notating a given passage.
- ★ Learn the basics of constructing your response to the prompt.
- ★ Examine student models that respond to the diagnostic exam's analysis essay prompt.
- ★ Learn how the rubrics were used to rate the student sample essays.

---

After your brief break, you will be given a packet that contains all three essay prompts and several texts that are specifically related to the synthesis essay. You will have 15 minutes to read the prompts and the texts. During this time period, the essay test booklet must remain sealed. After the initial 15 minutes have elapsed, you will be directed to open the test booklet and begin to write your three essays. You will have 2 hours to write your essays.

On the cover of the booklet you will find the breakdown of the three essays and the time suggested for each.

## Section II

Total Time—2¼ hours

Number of questions—3

Percent of total grade—55

Each question counts one-third of the total section score.

*Note:* You will have a total of 2 hours to write, which you may divide any way you choose. However, each essay carries the same weight, so do **NOT** spend an inappropriate amount of time on any one question.

The next step is to quickly turn the pages of the packet and skim the given selections. This should take you less than a minute.

## Some Basics

### Just What Is an AP English Language Analysis Essay?

Generally, the student is presented with a prose passage that can be drawn from various genres and time periods. Although the specific tasks asked of the student may vary from year to year, they almost always involve the analysis of language, including **retorical strategies** and **stylistic elements**. (If you are in doubt about the meaning of the underlined terms, make certain to refer to the Glossary and the Comprehensive Review section.)



You may be extremely lucky and find a familiar piece by a familiar author. This certainly can enhance your comfort level. But, don't try to plug into the question everything you know about that author or selection if it does not exactly fit the prompt. Likewise, do not be rattled if you are unfamiliar with the work. You will be familiar with the approaches necessary to analyze it. Remember, this exam reaches thousands of students, many of whom will be in a similar situation and equally anxious. Be confident that you are thoroughly prepared to tackle these tasks and have fun doing so.

### What Is the Purpose of the Analysis Essay?

The College Board wants to determine your facility with reading, understanding, and analyzing challenging texts. They also want to assess how well you manipulate language to communicate your written analysis of a specific topic to a mature audience. **The level of your writing should be a direct reflection of your critical thinking.**

AP is looking for connections between analysis and the passage. For example, when you find an image, identify it and connect it to the prompt. Don't just list items as you locate them.

*“Doing close readings of editorial columns in newspapers and magazines is a real help to my students as they prepare to attack both multiple-choice questions and analysis essays.”*

—Chris S.,  
AP teacher

## Types of Analysis Essay Prompts

### What Kinds of Questions Are Asked in the Analysis Essay?

Let's look at a few of the TYPES of questions that have been asked on the AP English Language and Composition exam in the past. These types may seem more familiar to you if you see them in the form of prompts.

- Analyze an author's view on a specific subject.
- Analyze rhetorical devices used by an author to achieve his or her purpose.
- Analyze stylistic elements in a passage and their effects.
- Analyze the author's tone and how the author conveys this tone.
- Compare and/or contrast two passages with regard to style, purpose, or tone.
- Analyze the author's purpose and how he or she achieves it.
- Analyze some of the ways an author re-creates a real or imagined experience.
- Analyze how an author presents him- or herself in the passage.
- Discuss the intended and/or probable effect of a passage.

You should be prepared to write an essay based on any of these prompts. Practice. Practice. Practice. Anticipate questions. Keep a running list of the kinds of questions your teacher asks.

It's good to remember that the tasks demanded of you by the question remain constant. What changes is the source material on which you base your response to the question. Therefore, your familiarity with the terms and processes related to the types of questions is crucial.



TIP

Don't be thrown by the complexity of the passage. *You* choose the references you want to incorporate into your essay. So, even if you haven't understood everything, you *can* write an intelligent essay—AS LONG AS YOU ADDRESS THE PROMPT and refer to the parts of the passage you do understand.

Watch for overconfidence when you see what you believe to be an easy question with an easy passage. You are going to have to work harder to find the nuances in the text that will allow you to write a mature essay.

## Rating the Analysis Essay



STRATEGY

### How Do the AP Readers Rate My Essay?

It's important to understand just what it is that goes into rating your essay. This is called a **rubric**, but don't let that word frighten you. A rubric is just a fancy, professional word that simply means the **rating standards that are set and used by the people who read the essays**. These standards are fairly consistent, no matter what the given prompt might be. The only primary change is in the citing of the specifics in a particular prompt.

As experienced readers of AP exams, let us assure you that the readers are trained to *reward* those things you do well in addressing the question. They are NOT looking to punish you. They are aware of the time constraints and read your essay just as your own instructor would read the first draft of an essay you wrote on a 40-minute exam. These readers do look forward to reading an interesting, insightful, and well-constructed essay.

So, let's take a look at these rubrics.

*Remember:  
PROMPT is  
another word for  
QUESTION.*

*“Throughout the year,  
I have students mimic  
the styles of various  
authors. We, then,  
present the pieces to  
the class, which tries  
to identify the author  
being imitated.  
Through this process,  
the students become  
more cognizant  
of what makes up  
style, tone, syntax,  
and diction.”  
—Denise C.,  
AP teacher*

A **9** essay has all the qualities of an 8 essay, and the writing style is especially impressive, as is the analysis of the specifics related to the prompt and the text.

An **8** essay will effectively and cohesively address the prompt. It will analyze and/or argue the elements called for in the question. In addition, it will do so using appropriate evidence from the given text. The essay will also show the writer’s ability to control language well.

A **7** essay has all the properties of a 6, only with a more complete, well-developed analysis/argument or a more mature writing style.

A **6** essay adequately addresses the prompt. The analysis and/or argument is on target and makes use of appropriate specifics from the text. However, these elements are less fully developed than scores in the 7, 8, and 9 range. The writer’s ideas are expressed with clarity, but the writing may have a few errors in syntax and/or diction.

A **5** essay demonstrates that the writer understands the prompt. The analysis/argument is generally understandable but is limited or uneven. The writer’s ideas are expressed clearly with a few errors in syntax or diction.

A **4** essay is not an adequate response to the prompt. The writer’s analysis/argument of the text indicates a misunderstanding, an oversimplification, or a misrepresentation of the given passage. The writer may use evidence which is inappropriate or insufficient to support the analysis/argument.

A **3** essay is a lower 4, because it is even less effective in addressing the prompt. It is also less mature in its syntax and organization.

A **2** essay indicates little success in speaking to the prompt. The writer may misread the question, only summarize the passage, fail to develop the required analysis/argument, or simply ignore the prompt and write about another topic. The writing may also lack organization and control of language and syntax. (**Note: No matter how good the summary, it will never rate more than a 2.**)

A **1** essay is a lower 2, because it is even more simplistic, disorganized, and lacking in control of language.

REMEMBER, THIS ESSAY IS REALLY A FIRST DRAFT. THE READERS KNOW THIS AND APPROACH EACH ESSAY KEEPING THIS IN MIND.

## Timing and Planning the Analysis Essay

### Just How Should I Plan to Spend My Time Writing This Type of Essay?

Remember, timing is crucial. With that in mind, here’s a workable strategy:

- 1–3 minutes reading and working the prompt.
- 5 minutes reading and making marginal notes regarding the passage.
  - Try to isolate two references that strike you. This may give you your opening and closing.
- 10 minutes preparing to write. (Choose one or two of these methods with which you’re comfortable.)
  - Highlighting
  - Marginal mapping
  - Charts or key word/one word/line number outlining
- 20 minutes writing your essay, based on your preparation.
- 3 minutes proofreading.



## Working the Prompt

For the purposes of this text, highlighting refers to any annotative technique, including underlining, circling, marginal notes, or using colored markers. The AP exam does NOT permit the use of highlighters, but this technique is valuable in other circumstances.

### How Should I Go About Reading the Prompt?

To really bring the answer home to you, we are going to deconstruct a prompt for you right now. (This is the same question that is in the Diagnostic/Master exam you first saw in the introduction to this book.)

You should plan to spend 1–3 minutes carefully reading the question. This gives you time to really digest what the question is asking you to do.

Here's the prompt:

**The following paragraphs are from the opening of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. After carefully reading the excerpt, write a well-organized essay in which you characterize Capote's view of Holcomb, Kansas, and analyze how Capote conveys this view. Your analysis may consider such stylistic elements as diction, imagery, syntax, structure, tone, and selection of detail.**



TIP

In the margin, note what time you should be finished with this essay. For example, the test starts at 1:00. You write 1:40 in the margin. Time to move on.

Here are three reasons why you do a 1–3-minute careful analysis of the prompt.

1. Once you know what is expected, you will read in a more directed manner.
2. Once you internalize the question, you will be sensitive to those details that will apply.
3. Once you know all the facets that must be addressed, you will be able to write a complete essay demonstrating adherence to the topic.



KEY IDEA

**TOPIC ADHERENCE, WHICH MEANS STICKING TO THE QUESTION, IS A KEY STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING A HIGH SCORE.**

### DO THIS NOW.

Highlight, circle, or underline the essential terms and elements in the prompt.

(Time yourself) How long did it take you? \_\_\_\_\_

(Don't worry if it took you longer than 1–3 minutes with this first attempt. You will be practicing this technique throughout this review, and it will become almost second nature to you.)

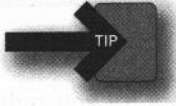
Compare our highlighting of the prompt with yours.

The following paragraphs are from the opening of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. After carefully reading the excerpt, write a well-organized essay in which you characterize Capote's view of Holcomb, Kansas, and analyze how Capote conveys this view. Your analysis may consider such stylistic elements as diction, imagery, syntax, structure, tone, and selection of detail.

In this prompt, anything else you may have highlighted is extraneous.

*Note:* When the question reads *such as*, you are not required to use only those ideas presented; you are free to use your own selection of techniques, strategies, and devices. Notice the prompt requires more than one element. You **MUST** use more than one. Sorry, one will not be enough. No matter how well-presented, your essay will be incomplete.

Review terms related to elements of style and techniques and methods of analysis.



Sometimes the incidental data given in the prompt, such as the title of the work, the author, the date of publication, the genre, etc., can prove helpful.

## Reading and Notating the Passage

Finally, **READ THE PASSAGE**. Depending on your style and comfort level, choose one of these approaches to your **close reading**.

1. A. Read quickly to get the gist of the passage.  
B. Reread, using the highlighting and marginal notes approach discussed in this chapter.
2. A. Read slowly, using highlighting and marginal notes.  
B. Reread to confirm that you have caught the full impact of the passage.

*Note:* In both approaches, you **MUST** highlight and make marginal notes. There is no way to avoid this. Ignore what you don't immediately understand. It may become clear to you after reading the passage. Practice. Practice. Concentrate on those parts of the passage that apply to what you highlighted in the prompt.

There are many ways to read and analyze any given passage. You have to choose what to use and which specifics to include for support.

Don't be rattled if there is leftover material.

We've reproduced the passage for you below so that you can practice both the reading and the process of deconstructing the text. Use highlighting, arrows, circles, underlining, notes, numbers, whatever you need to make the connections clear to you.

**DO THIS NOW.**

Spend between 8 and 10 minutes "working the material."

**DO NOT SKIP THIS STEP.** It is time well spent and is a key to the high score essay.

### **Excerpt from the opening of *In Cold Blood***

The village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call "out there." Some seventy miles east of the Colorado border, the countryside, with its hard blue skies and desert-clear air, has an atmosphere that is rather more Far Western than Middle West. The local accent is barbed with a prairie twang, a ranch-hand nasalness, and the men, many of them, wear narrow frontier trousers, Stetsons, and high-heeled boots with pointed toes. The land is flat, and the views are awesomely extensive; horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them.

Holcomb, too, can be seen from great distances. Not that there is much to see—simply an aimless congregation of buildings divided in the center by the main-line tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad, a

haphazard hamlet bounded on the south by a brown stretch of the Arkansas (pronounced “Ar-kan-sas”) River, on the north by a highway, Route 50, and on the east and west by prairie lands and wheat fields. After rain, or when snowfalls thaw, the streets, unnamed, unshaded, unpaved, turn from the thickest dust into the direst mud. At one end of the town stands a stark old stucco structure, the roof of which supports an electric sign—Dance—but the dancing has ceased and the advertisement has been dark for several years. Nearby is another building with an irrelevant sign, this one in flaking gold on a dirty window—HOLCOMB BANK. The bank closed in 1933, and it is one of the town’s two “apartment houses,” the second being a ramshackle mansion known, because a good part of the local school’s faculty lives there, as the Teacherage. But the majority of Holcomb’s homes are one-story frame affairs, with front porches.

Down by the depot, the postmistress, a gaunt woman who wears a rawhide jacket and denims and cowboy boots, presides over a falling-apart post office. The depot, itself, with its peeling sulphur-colored paint, is equally melancholy; the Chief, the Super Chief, the El Capitan go by every day, but these celebrated expresses never pause there. No passenger trains do—only an occasional freight. Up on the highway, there are two filling stations, one of which doubles as a meagerly supplied grocery store, while the other does extra duty as a cafe—Hartman’s Cafe, where Mrs. Hartman, the proprietress, dispenses sandwiches, coffee, soft drinks, and 3.2 beer. (Holcomb, like all the rest of Kansas, is “dry.”)

And that, really, is all. Unless you include, as one must, the Holcomb School, a good-looking establishment, which reveals a circumstance that the appearance of the community otherwise camouflages: that the parents who send their children to this modern and ably staffed “consolidated” school—the grades go from kindergarten through senior high, and a fleet of buses transport the students, of which there are usually around three hundred and sixty, from as far as sixteen miles away—are, in general, a prosperous people. . . . The farm ranchers in Finney County, of which Holcomb is a part, have done well; money has been made not from farming alone but also from the exploitation of plentiful natural-gas resources, and its acquisition is reflected in the new school, the comfortable interiors of the farmhouses, the steep and swollen grain elevators.

Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans—in fact, few Kansans—had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Santa Fe tracks, drama in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there. The inhabitants of the village, numbering two hundred and seventy, were satisfied that this should be so, quite content to exist inside ordinary life . . .

Now, compare your reading notes with what we’ve done. Yours may vary from ours, but the results of your note taking should be similar in scope.


**STRATEGY**

Notice that, in the sample, we have used a kind of shorthand for our notations. Rather than repeating the specific elements or points each time they are found in the text, we have numbered the major points.

- 1 = Something old West and insignificant about Holcomb
- 2 = The starkness of the town
- 3 = People reflecting the setting
- 4 = Contrast between first three paragraphs and the last two

This saves precious time. All you need do is list the categories and number each. Then, as you go through the text, number specifics that support these categories.

### Excerpt from the opening of *In Cold Blood*

The village<sup>2</sup> of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains<sup>2</sup> of western Kansas, a lonesome area<sup>2</sup> that other Kansans call “out there.”<sup>2</sup> Some seventy miles east of the Colorado border, the countryside, with its hard blue skies and desert-clear air<sup>2</sup>, has an atmosphere that is rather more Far Western than Middle West<sup>1</sup>. The local accent is barbed<sup>1</sup> with a prairie twang, a ranch-hand nasalness<sup>3</sup>, and the men, many of them, wear narrow frontier trousers, Stetsons, and high-heeled boots with pointed toes<sup>1 & 3</sup>. The land is flat<sup>1</sup>, and the views are awesomely extensive; horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them.

Holcomb, too, can be seen from great distances<sup>1 & 2</sup>. Not that there is much to see—simply an aimless<sup>1</sup> congregation of buildings divided in the center by the main-line tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad, a haphazard hamlet bounded on the south by a brown stretch<sup>2</sup> of the Arkansas (pronounced “Ar-kan-sas”) River, on the north by a highway, Route 50, and on the east and west by prairie lands and wheat fields<sup>1</sup>. After rain, or when snowfalls thaw, the streets, unnamed, unshaded, unpaved<sup>1</sup>, turn from the thickest dust into the direst mud<sup>2</sup>. At one end of the town stands a stark old stucco structure<sup>2</sup>, the roof of which supports an electric sign—Dance<sup>2</sup>—but the dancing has ceased<sup>2</sup> and the advertisement has been dark for several years. Nearby is another building with an irrelevant sign<sup>1</sup>, this one in flaking gold on a dirty window<sup>2</sup>—HOLCOMB BANK. The bank closed in 1933, and it is one of the town’s two “apartment houses,” the second being a ramshackle mansion<sup>2</sup> known, because a good part of the local school’s faculty lives there, as the Teacherage. But the majority of Holcomb’s homes are one-story frame affairs, with front porches<sup>1</sup>.

Down by the depot, the postmistress, a gaunt woman<sup>2 & 3</sup> who wears a rawhide<sup>3</sup> jacket<sup>1</sup> and denims and cowboy boots, presides over a falling-apart post office<sup>2</sup>. The depot, itself, with its peeling sulphur-colored paint<sup>2</sup>, is equally melancholy<sup>2</sup>; the Chief, the Super Chief, the El Capitan go by every day, but these celebrated expresses never pause there<sup>2</sup>. No passenger trains do—only an occasional freight. Up on the highway, there are two filling stations, one of which doubles as a meagerly supplied<sup>1 & 2</sup> grocery store, while the other does extra duty as a cafe—Hartman’s Cafe, where Mrs. Hartman, the proprietress, dispenses sandwiches, coffee, soft drinks, and 3.2 beer. (Holcomb, like all the rest of Kansas, is “dry.”)



And that, really, is all. Unless you include, as one must, the Holcomb School, a good-looking establishment, which reveals a circumstance that the appearance of the community otherwise camouflages: that the parents who send their children to this modern and ably staffed “consolidated” school—the grades go from kindergarten through senior high, and a fleet of buses transport the students, of which there are usually around three hundred and sixty, from as far as sixteen miles away—are, in general, a prosperous people. . . . The farm ranchers in Finney County, of which Holcomb is a part, have done well; money has been made not from farming alone but also from the exploitation of plentiful natural-gas resources, and its acquisition is reflected in the new school, the comfortable interiors of the farmhouses, the steep and swollen grain elevators. Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans—in fact, few Kansans—had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Sante Fe tracks, drama in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there. The inhabitants of the village, numbering two hundred and seventy, were satisfied that this should be so, quite content to exist inside ordinary life. . . .

## Developing the Opening Paragraph



After you have marked your passage, review the prompt. Now, choose the elements you are able to identify and analyze those that support Capote’s view. To demonstrate, we have chosen structure, tone, and selection of detail.

Now, it’s time to write. Your opening statement is the one that catches the eye of the reader and sets the expectation and tone of your essay. Spend time on your first paragraph to maximize your score. A suggested approach is to relate a direct reference from the passage to the topic. Make certain that the topic is very clear to the reader. This reinforces the idea that you fully understand what is expected of you and what you will communicate to the reader. As always, identify both the text and its author in this first paragraph.

Now, you try it. Write your own first paragraph for this prompt. Write quickly, referring to your notes. Let’s check what you’ve written:

- Have you included author, title?
- Have you addressed “Capote’s view of Holcomb”?
- Have you specifically mentioned the elements you will refer to in your essay?

Here are four sample opening paragraphs that address each of the above criteria:

### A

In the opening of *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote presents a picture of the town of Holcomb, Kansas. Through structure, selection of detail, and a detached tone, he makes it clear that he views Holcomb as dull and ordinary.

**B**

Holcomb, Kansas. Holcomb, Kansas. Even the sound of the place is boring and uninteresting. Moreover, Truman Capote seems to agree with this in his opening to *In Cold Blood*. I, too, would be inclined to pass by this sleepy, bland, and undistinguished hamlet. This view is developed through the author's tone, structure, and selection of detail.

**C**

"Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Sante Fe tracks, drama in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped here." This is the town of Holcomb, Kansas. Using a reportorial tone, specific structure, and selection of detail, Capote introduces the reader to this unremarkable town in the opening of *In Cold Blood*.

**D**

*In Cold Blood* is a very appropriate title, because Capote presents a cold and unemotional view of Holcomb, Kansas. His tone, structure, and selection of detail create a distant and detached picture of this desolate farm community.

Each of these opening paragraphs is an acceptable beginning to this AP English Language and Composition exam essay. Look at what each of the paragraphs has in common:

- Each has identified the title and author.
- Each has stated which stylistic elements will be used.
- Each has stated the purpose of analyzing these elements.

However, observe what is different about the opening paragraphs.

- **Sample A** restates the question without elaborating. It is to the point and correct, but it does not really pique the reader's interest. (Use this type of opening if you feel unsure or uncomfortable with the prompt.)
- **Sample B** reflects a writer who really has a voice. He or she has already determined Capote's view and indicates that he or she understands how this view is created.
- **Sample C** immediately places the reader into the passage by referring specifically to it.
- **Sample D** reveals a mature, confident writer who is unafraid to make his or her own voice heard.

*Note:* There are many other types of opening paragraphs that could also do the job. Into which of the above samples could your opening paragraph be classified?

## Writing the Body of the Essay

### What Should I Include in the Body of This Analysis Essay?

1. Obviously, this is where you present *your* analysis and the points you want to make that are related to the prompt.
2. Adhere to the question.
3. Use specific references and details from the passage.
  - Don't always paraphrase the original. Refer directly to it.
  - Place quotation marks around those words/phrases you extract from the passage.



4. Use “connective tissue” in your essay to establish adherence to the question.
- Use the repetition of key ideas in the prompt and in your opening paragraph.
  - Try using “echo words” (that is, synonyms: *town/villagelhamlet; bland/ordinary/undistinguished*).
  - Use transitions between paragraphs (see Chapter 8).

To understand the process, carefully read the sample paragraphs below. Each develops one of the elements asked for in the prompt. Notice the specific references and the “connective tissue.” Details that do not apply to the prompt are ignored.

### A

This paragraph develops **tone**.

Throughout the passage, Capote maintains a tone that resembles a detached reporter who is an observer of a scene. Although the impact of the passage is seeing Holcomb in a less than positive light, the author rarely uses judgmental terminology or statements. In describing the town, he uses words such as “float,” “haphazard,” “unnamed,” “unshaded,” “unpaved.” Individuals are painted with an objective brush showing them in “denim,” “Stetsons,” and “cowboy boots.” Capote maintains his panning camera angle when he writes of the buildings and the surrounding farmland. This matter-of-fact approach is slightly altered when he begins to portray the townspeople as a whole when he uses such words as “prosperous people,” “comfortable interiors,” and “have done well.” His objective tone, interestingly enough, does exactly what he says the folks of Holcomb do. He “camouflages” his attitude toward the reality of the place and time.

### B

This paragraph develops **structure**.

Capote organizes his passage spatially. He brings his reader from “great distances” to the periphery of the village with its borders of “main-line tracks” and roads, river and fields, to the heart of the town and its “unnamed, unshaded, unpaved” streets. As the reader journeys through the stark village, he or she is led eventually from the outskirts to the town’s seemingly one bright spot—the prosperous Holcomb school. Capote develops our interest in the school by contrasting it with the bleak and lonely aspects of the first three paragraphs. He shifts our view with the word “unless” and focuses on the positive aspects of the town. Holcomb “has done well” despite its forbidding description. The passage could end now, except that Capote chooses to develop his next paragraph with the words, “until one morning,” thus taking the reader on another journey, one of foreshadowing and implication. Something other than wheat is on the horizon.

### C

This paragraph develops selection of **detail**.

In selecting his details, Capote presents a multilayered Holcomb, Kansas. The town is first presented as stark and ordinary. It is a “lonesome area” with “hard blue skies,” where “the land is flat” and the buildings are an “aimless congregation.” The ordinary qualities of the village are reinforced by his references to the “unnamed” streets, “one-story frame” houses, and the fact that “celebrated expresses never pause there” (i.e., the “Chief, the Super Chief, the El Capitan”). Details portray the citizens of Holcomb in the same light. Ranch hands speak with “barbed” and nasal “twangs.” They wear the stereotypical “cowboy” uniform and so does the “gaunt” postmistress in her “rawhide jacket.” Once this description is established, the author contrasts it with an unexpected view of

the town. He now deals with the appearance of Holcomb's "camouflages," the "modern" school, the "prosperous people," the "comfortable interiors," and the "swollen grain elevators." If Capote chooses to illuminate this contrast, does it indicate more to come?



**Study Group:** Approach a subject in a joint manner. After you've deconstructed the prompt, have each person write a paragraph on a separate area of the question. Come together and discuss. You'll be amazed how much fun this is, because the work will carry you away. This is a chance to explore very exciting ideas.

We urge you to spend more time developing the body paragraphs rather than worrying about a concluding paragraph, especially one beginning with "*In conclusion,*" or "*In summary.*" To be honest, in such a brief essay, the reader can remember what you have already stated. It is not necessary to repeat yourself in a summary final paragraph.

If you want to make a final statement, try to link your ideas to a particularly effective line or image from the passage. (It's a good thing.)



Look at the last line of Sample **B** on structure.

***Something other than wheat is on the horizon.***

Or, look at the last line of Sample **C** on selection of detail.

***If Capote chooses to illuminate this contrast, does it indicate more to come?***

Each of these two final sentences would be just fine as conclusions to the essay. A conclusion does not have to be a paragraph. It can be the writer's final remark/observation in a sentence or two.

#### DO THIS NOW.

Write the body of your essay. Time yourself.

When you write the body of your essay, take only 15–20 minutes.

Find a way to time yourself, and try your best to finish within that time frame.

Because this is practice, don't panic if you can't complete your essay within the given 20 minutes. You will become more and more comfortable with the tasks presented to you as you gain more experience with this type of question.

Refer to the Comprehensive Review section of this book on developing the body of an AP Language and Composition essay.

NOTE: Sharing your writing with members of your class or study group will allow you and all of the participants to gain more experience and more of a comfort zone with requirements and possibilities.

## Sample Student Essays

Here are two actual student essays with comments on each.

### Student Sample A

Truly successful authors have the ability to convey their view of a place without actually saying it, to portray a landscape in a certain light simply by describing it. In the provided excerpt taken from the opening paragraphs of *In Cold Blood*, Truman

Capote does just this. Through his use of stylistic elements such as selection of detail, imagery, and figurative language, Capote reveals his own solemn and mysterious view of Holcomb, Kansas, while setting the stage for an imminent change.

Beginning in the first line of the passage, Capote selects the most boring details of life in the small town in order to portray its solemnity. He draws attention to the physical isolation of Holcomb by referring to it as the place that “other Kansans call ‘out there.’” In addition, he speaks of the parameters of the small town, pointing out that it is enclosed on all sides by rivers, prairies, and wheat fields. He describes the town as remote and unaffected, desolate and boring, continually mentioning the old, peeling paint and “irrelevant signs” that dot the landscape. Capote also gives the village a feeling of laziness in his writing, describing it as an “aimless congregation of buildings” and a “haphazard hamlet.” He obviously feels that the town lacks liveliness, that it is bland and unchanging, simple and average. Almost looking down on the village and its inhabitants, the author characterizes the people in broad categories and focuses on their outward appearances and superficial similarities instead of delving more deeply into their abilities or livelihoods. This reveals that he views the people and their surroundings as one-dimensional and simplistic. The idea that he may summarize an entire town, generalize about its people and not be far from the truth, contributes greatly to Capote’s solemn view of Holcomb. One gets the feelings from the author’s selection of detail that he wishes there was something more interesting, deeper, to share with his audience, and is disappointed by the cursory nature in which he must approach the description of such a melancholy place. 2

In addition to including the most boring of details, Capote uses a great deal of imagery to describe the town and its residents. Focusing mostly on visual appeal, he describes the “sulphur-colored paint” and “flaking gold” to reveal the town’s atrophying appearance and has-been status. Portraying the area as one that has seen better days, Capote writes about the “old stucco structure” that no longer holds dances, the crumbling post office, and the bank that now fails to serve its original purpose. Combining visual imagery with hints of desolation and obsolescence, Capote attempts to reveal the gray and boring nature of the town through its appearance. He does not, however, rely only on visual details; in describing the local accent as “barbed with a prairie twang,” he uses both auditory and visual appeal to make one imagine a ranch-hand’s tone of voice and pattern of speech as he describes the monotonous events of his farming days. The “hard blue skies and desert-clear air” contribute to a feeling of emptiness, an emotional vacancy that seems omnipresent in the small town. Finally, even “the steep and swollen grain elevators” that represent the town’s prosperity are seen in a solemn and mysterious light, as Capote makes certain to mention that the townspeople camouflage this abundance without explaining why they choose to do so. 3

Capote also uses a great deal of figurative language and contrasts to portray the small town as solemn and dead, yet somewhat mysterious. The area’s intrigue lies more in its paradoxes than in its appearance, more in what Capote fails to explain than what he discusses. With the simile, “a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as 4

Greek temples,” he almost points toward a happy, prosperous side of the town for the first and perhaps only time in this passage. Not long after this sentence, however, the author describes the streets as “unnamed, unshaded, unpaved,” returning to his description of the village as desolate and empty, so destroyed that it is almost primitive.

This is not the only contrast of Capote’s opening paragraphs; it seems the entire passage paints the town as quiet and simple only so that it may shock us with what is to come. The author uses personification at the end of the passage, stating that “drama . . . had never stopped there.” The position of these words, just after he discusses the positive aspects of the school and its students’ families, results in yet another contrast, another mysterious solemnity. Finally, in the last paragraph of this excerpt, when Capote writes “until one morning . . . few . . . had ever heard of Holcomb,” the reader becomes aware that the solemn nature of this town is about to change. It becomes clear that the reader has been somewhat set up by Capote, made to view the town in the same way the author does, so that we may then realize the shock of the approaching aberration.

Through his use of stylistic elements, Capote builds the perfect scenery for the setting of a murder, the perfect simple town waiting for a complicated twist, a faded flower or ghost town that has surely seen better days. By the end of the passage, he has already warned the reader that everything he has stated about Holcomb is about to change, that the quiet and solitude, the blandness of the small town, may soon be replaced by very different descriptions.

### Student Sample B

Holcomb, Kansas, a village containing two hundred and seventy inhabitants, has skipped over the drama of life, according to Truman Capote. The square town is described spatially with houses, rivers, fields of wheat, stations, a bank, and a school. In Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, an image of the town of Holcomb is presented through precise types of diction, syntax, imagery, and tone.

In order to convey a Western dialect used in Holcomb, Capote refers to the town as, “out there,” and addresses the pronunciation of the Arkansas River with an informative, “Ar-kan-sas.” Throughout the town there are quite a few signs which transmit the ghostliness present there. For example, “—Dance—but the dancing has ceased and the advertisement has been dark for several years,” and “HOLCOMB BANK,” which is later on discussed as being closed down, demonstrate the vacantness of the town. To create a better concept of the land itself, Capote uses alliterative devices and an allusion when he states, “horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them.” This magnifies the field-like setting, and some of the town’s old remnants of massive buildings. Altogether, the author’s utilization of diction devices greatly personifies the town.

Although not a glaring feature of the excerpt, the sentence structure plays an important role in developing the author’s viewpoint. He predominantly utilizes compound sentences, and complex with some prepositional phrases. The use of parallel

structures such as, “Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Sante Fe tracks . . .” greatly adds to the monotony of the town. “(Holcomb, like all the rest of Kansas, is ‘dry’.)” is one of the numerous similes found throughout the passage that create a sense of vacancy within the town.

Capote’s use of all of these literary devices envelope the reader into picturing what Holcomb looks like, a worn out, rustic town filled with “grain elevators,” or fields and fields of wheat. The reference to the grain and wheat exemplifies the daily activities that occur in the town. After all of the rural descriptions, a vision of the school is given, as it “camouflages” into the mix. Reading about all of the emptiness of the town, then envisioning a school that is the pride of the town provides insight into the type of people the inhabitants of Holcomb are. For example, they are described as, “in general, a prosperous people.” Overall, a precise and objective image of the town, along with the townspeople is certainly focused on in the passage. 4

Encompassing all of the author’s literary, stylistic approaches, one is able to “hear” a voice or tone in the reading. A feeling of desolation, weariness, and loneliness should be derived from reading about this town, and a sense of rejuvenation is experienced toward the closing of the excerpt due to descriptions of the school. In exemplifying that the town has pride in one area, which is education, it leaves the reader with a sense of hope in the town and in its inhabitants. A strong voice toward Holcomb of its rugged, run down, and exhausted institutions is present. 5

Truman Capote’s excerpt from *In Cold Blood*, which objectively describes Holcomb, a town in Kansas, is profoundly written because of its abundance of allusions, alliteration, imagery, and particular syntax utilized. Capote’s detailing enables one to envision what the town looks like because of spatial and in-depth descriptions. 6

## Rating the Essays



### Let’s Take a Look at a Set of Rubrics for This Analysis Essay

By the way, if you want to see actual AP rubrics as used in a recent AP English Language and Composition exam, log onto the College Board website at [www.collegeboard.org/ap](http://www.collegeboard.org/ap).

As you probably know, essays are rated on a 9–1 scale, with 9 being the highest and 1 the lowest. Because we are not there with you to rate your essay personally and to respond to your style and approach, we are going to list the criteria for high-, middle-, and low-range papers. These criteria are based on our experience with rubrics and reading AP Literature essays.

A **HIGH** range essay can be a 9, an 8, or a high-end 7. **MIDDLE** refers to essays in the 7 to 5 range, and the **LOW** scoring essays are rated 4 to 1.

Let’s be honest with each other. You and I both can recognize a 9 essay. It sings, and we wish we could have written it. And, it’s wonderful that the essays don’t all have to sing the same song with the same words and rhythm. Conversely, we can, unfortunately, recognize the 1 or 2 paper, which is off-key; and we are relieved not to have written it.

**High-Range Essay (9, 8, 7)**

- Indicates complete understanding of the prompt
- Integrates the analysis of Capote's view of Holcomb with his tone
- Explores the implications of the contrasts within the excerpt
- Identifies and analyzes stylistic elements, such as imagery, diction, structure, selection of detail
- Cites specific references to the passage
- Illustrates and supports the points being made
- Is clear, well-organized, and coherent
- Reflects the ability to manipulate language at an advanced level
- Contains, if any, only minor errors/flaws

*Note:* A 7 essay rated in the high range makes the jump from the middle range because of its more mature style and perception.

**Mid-Range Essay (7, 6, 5)**

- Refers accurately to the prompt
- Refers accurately to the stylistic elements used by Capote
- Provides a less thorough analysis of the development of Capote's view of Holcomb than the higher-rated paper
- Is less adept at linking techniques to the purpose of the passage
- Demonstrates writing that is adequate to convey the writer's intent
- May not be sensitive to the contrasts in the excerpts and their implications

*Note:*

- The 7 paper demonstrates a more consistent command of college-level writing than does the 5 or 6 essay.
- A 5 paper does the minimum required by the prompt. It relies on generalizations and sketchy analysis. It is often sidetracked by plot and the references may be limited or simplistic.

**Low-Range Essay (4, 3, 2, 1)**

- Does not respond adequately to the prompt
- Demonstrates insufficient and/or inaccurate understanding of the passage
- Does not link stylistic elements to Capote's view of Holcomb
- Underdevelops and/or inaccurately analyzes the development of Capote's view of Holcomb
- Fails to demonstrate an understanding of Capote's tone
- Demonstrates weak control of the elements of diction, syntax, and organization

*Note:*

- A 4 or 3 essay may do no more than paraphrase sections of the passage rather than analyze Capote's view of Holcomb.
- A 2 essay may merely summarize the passage.  
(NO MATTER HOW WELL WRITTEN, A SUMMARY CAN NEVER EARN MORE THAN A 2.)
- A 1–2 essay indicates a major lack of understanding and control. It fails to comprehend the prompt and/or the passage. It may also indicate severe writing problems.



## Student Essay A

This is a **high-range** paper for the following reasons:

- It is on task.
- It indicates complete understanding of the prompt and the passage.
- It uses mature diction [paragraph 1: “Capote reveals . . . imminent change”], [paragraph 2: “Capote also gives . . . simplistic”], [paragraph 3: “the hard blue skies . . . to do so”].
- It integrates references to support the thesis of the essay [paragraph 2: “Capote also gives . . . hamlet”], [paragraph 3: “Focusing . . . has-been status”], [paragraph 4: “with the simile . . . passage”].
- It grasps subtleties and implications [paragraph 1: “Capote reveals . . . change”], [paragraph 2: “One gets . . . place”], [paragraph 4: “The area’s . . . discusses”], [paragraph 6: “By the end . . . descriptions”].
- It introduces specifics in a sophisticated manner [paragraph 3: “He does not . . . farming days”], [paragraph 5: “The author . . . solemnity”].
- It uses good “connective tissue” [paragraphs 2 and 3: “in addition”], [paragraph 4: “Capote also uses . . .”], [paragraph 5: “This is not the only contrast . . .”].
- It creates original and insightful comments [paragraph 2: “one gets . . . melancholy place”], [paragraph 3: “He does not . . . farming days”].
- It presents a conclusion that introduces unique observations and brings the reader directly to what may follow this passage.

This is a high-range essay that indicates a writer who “gets it”—who clearly understands the passage and the prompt and who can present ideas in a mature, controlled voice.

## Student Essay B

This is a **mid-range** essay for the following reasons:

- It sets up an introduction that indicates the writer’s understanding of the prompt.
- It cites appropriate specifics, but often does not adequately integrate these into the analysis [paragraph 2: “In order . . . present there”], [paragraph 3, sentence 2].
- It uses frequently awkward diction and syntax [first line of paragraph 2], [last sentence of paragraph 2], [all of paragraph 5].
- It demonstrates good topic adherence.
- It reveals a facility with stylistic analysis [paragraph 2: “To create . . . reaches them”], [paragraph 3, sentence 3].
- It presents a conclusion that does not add anything to the impact of the essay.

This mid-range paper indicates a writer who understands both the prompt and the process of analysis. However, the essay does not address the subtle, underlying purpose of the passage and ignores the foreshadowing and contrast. The writer’s frequently awkward and disconnected diction and syntax prevent it from achieving the level of the high-range essays.

## Now It’s Your Turn

1. Try a little reverse psychology. Now that you are thoroughly familiar with this passage, construct two or three alternate AP level prompts. (Walk a little in the examiner’s shoes.) This will help you gain insight into the very process of test-making.

2. Find other examples of descriptions of setting you can analyze in the same way as you did with the Capote excerpt. You might want to investigate works by John Steinbeck, Joan Didion, Peter Matthiessen, and, certainly, Sebastian Jung's *The Perfect Storm*.

## Other Types of Analysis Essays

### Are There Other Types of Analysis Questions on the Exam?

You bet. Another analysis prompt you can expect on the exam asks the student to analyze the author's intended effect on the reader and how the author re-creates an experience. Still another type is comparison and contrast. This prompt can be based on either a fiction or a nonfiction passage.

### What Am I Expected to Do When Asked to Identify the Author's Intended Effect on the Reader?

No one can ever know what an author intended, unless you could personally approach the writer and ask, "Tell me, just exactly what did you intend the effect to be on your reader when you wrote this passage?" And, we all know that this is not a possibility for 999 out of 1,000 authors. This said, keep the following in mind.

The AP Comp test makers obviously believe that there is a clear, definite effect on the reader; otherwise, they would not be asking you to identify it. When writing about effect, think about your *personal* reaction to the text. While reading it, or as a result of reading it, how do you *feel* (happy, sad, angry, amused, perplexed, uplifted, motivated, informed, inspired, "connected"—you get the idea)?



### What Should I Try to Include in My Essay When I'm Asked to Analyze How an Author Re-creates an Experience?

Think about this. Have you ever tried to re-create your own personal experience for your friends, your family, or your teacher? Ask yourself what you did to ensure that your listeners would really feel as if they were actually there. Were you trying to be humorous or serious? You chose what you would say to introduce this experience, didn't you? Did you set up the scene with descriptions of the setting, the people? Did you tell them why you were there? What kind of details did you choose to include? Why those, and not others? What kind of language did you use? (You were quite aware that your audience responds to certain kinds of language manipulation.) Did you center the tale on yourself, the action, a person, or group of people? Did you emphasize actions, reactions, dialog? Did you tell the story in chronological order, or did you move back and forth in time? Did you interject personal comments? Did you tell the story so that the listeners felt a part of the experience or set apart from it? Did you emote or try to remain aloof?

Get the picture? This is the type of questioning that should be part of your process of analysis when asked how an author re-creates an experience.



### What Do I Do About the Comparison and Contrast Essay?

The comparison and contrast essay is not difficult, but it demands that you have organizational control over your material. First, carefully read the prompt and understand what you are being asked to compare and contrast. With this in mind, carefully read and annotate each of the given texts, looking for major points to support and illustrate your thesis. Next, decide on the structure you want to use to present your points:



- Point by point
- Subject by subject
- A combination of both of the preceding

### “Working the Prompt”



As you did with the previous essay, the very first thing you must do is to read and deconstruct the prompt carefully. What follows is a sample prompt that you could find in the essay section of the exam.

- Plan to spend 1–3 minutes carefully reading the question.
- After this initial reading, highlight the essential terms and elements of the prompt.

**Carefully read the following excerpt from Louisa May Alcott’s nonfiction narrative *Hospital Sketches* (1863). In a carefully constructed essay, identify the author’s intended effect on the reader and the ways in which the author re-creates her experience as a nurse in a U.S. Army hospital during the Civil War. Consider such elements as pacing, diction, imagery, selection of detail, and tone.**

Time yourself. How long did it take you? \_\_\_\_\_  
Compare your highlighting of the prompt with ours.

Carefully read the following excerpt from Louisa May Alcott’s nonfiction narrative *Hospital Sketches* (1863). In a carefully constructed essay, identify the author’s intended effect on the reader and the ways in which the author re-creates her experience as a nurse in a U.S. Army hospital during the Civil War. Consider such elements as pacing, diction, imagery, selection of detail, and tone.

As before, anything else you may have highlighted is extraneous. Notice that the prompt asks you to do TWO things. You must both identify the effect on the audience and analyze how the author re-creates her experience. If you address only one of these areas, your essay will be incomplete, no matter how well written it is.

**Review terms and strategies related to purpose, effect, organization.**

Follow the process for reading the passage we illustrated for you in the first section of this chapter. Remember, you are going to do a close reading that requires you to highlight and make marginal notes (glosses) that refer you to the section of the prompt that this citation illustrates.

#### DO THIS NOW.

Spend between 8 and 10 minutes “working the material.”

Do not skip this step. It is key to scoring well on the essay.

### “Death of a Soldier”

As I went on my hospital rounds with Dr. P., I happened to ask which man in the room suffered most. He glanced at John. “Every breath he draws is like a stab; for the ball pierced the left lung and broke a rib. The poor lad must lie on his wounded back or suffocate.” 1

“You don’t mean he must die, doctor?” 2

“There’s not the slightest hope for him.” 3

I could have sat down on the spot and cried heartily, if I had not learned the wisdom of bottling up one’s tears for leisure moments. The army needed men like John, earnest, brave, and faithful; fighting for liberty and justice with both heart and hand. 4

John sat with bent head, hands folded on his knee, and no outward sign of suffering, till, looking nearer, I saw great tears roll down and drop upon the floor. It was a new sight there; for, though I had seen many suffer, some swore, some groaned, most endured silently, but none wept. Yet it did not seem weak, only very touching, and straightway my fear vanished, my heart opened wide and took him in. Gathering the bent head in my arms, as freely as if he had been a little child, I said, “Let me help you bear it, John.” 5

Never, on any human countenance, have I seen so swift and beautiful a look of gratitude, surprise and comfort. He whispered, “Thank you, m’am, this is right good! I didn’t like to be a trouble; you seemed so busy . . .” 6

I bathed his face, brushed his bonny brown hair, set all things smooth about him. While doing this, he watched me with the satisfied expression I so liked to see. He spoke so hopefully when there was no hope. “This is my first battle; do they think it’s going to be my last?” 7

It was the hardest question I had ever been called upon to answer; doubly hard with those clear eyes fixed upon mine. “I’m afraid they do, John.” 8

He seemed a little startled at first, pondered over the fateful fact a moment, then shook his head. “I’m afraid, but it’s difficult to believe all at once. I’m so strong it don’t seem possible for such a little wound to kill me.” And then he said, “I’m a little sorry I wasn’t wounded in front; it looks cowardly to be hit in the back, but I obeyed orders.” 9

John was dying. Even while he spoke, over his face I saw a gray veil falling that no human hand can lift. I sat down by him, wiped drops from his forehead, stirred the air about him with a slow wave of a fan, and waited to help him die. For hours he suffered dumbly, without a moment’s murmuring; his limbs grew cold, his face damp, his lips white, and again and again he tore the covering off his breast, as if the lightest weight added to his agony. 10

One by one, the other men woke, and round the room appeared a circle of pale faces and watchful eyes, full of awe and pity; for, though a stranger, John was beloved by all. “Old boy, how are you?” faltered one. “Can I say or do anything for you anywheres?” whispered another. 11

“Take my things home, and tell them that I did my best.” 12

He died then; though the heavy breaths still tore their way up for a little longer, short they were but the waves of an ebbing tide that beat unfelt against the wreck. He never spoke again, but to the end held my hand close, so close that when he was asleep at last, I could not draw it away. Dan, another patient, helped me, warning me as he did so that it was unsafe for dead and living flesh to lie so long together. But though my hand was strangely cold and stiff, and four white marks remained across its back, even when warmth and color had returned elsewhere, I could not but be glad that, through its touch, the presence of human sympathy, perhaps had lightened that hard hour. 13

When they had made him ready for the grave, I stood looking at him. The lovely expression which so often beautifies dead faces soon replaced marks of pain. The ward master handed me a letter, saying it had come the night before but was forgot. It was John's letter, come just an hour too late to gladden the eyes that had longed for it so eagerly. 14

After I had cut some brown locks for his mother, and taken off the ring to send her, I kissed this good son for her sake, and laid the letter in his hand. Then I left him, glad to have known so genuine a man, and carrying with me an enduring memory of a brave Virginia blacksmith, as he lay serenely waiting for the dawn of that long day which knows no night. 15

Now, compare your reading notes with ours. As we said earlier, your notes may vary from ours, but the results should be similar in scope.

*focus/subject?*

### **“Death of a Soldier”**

*simile  
details*

As I went on my **hospital** rounds with Dr. P., I happened to ask which man in the room **suffered most**. He glanced at John. “Every **breath** he draws **is like a stab**; for the ball **pierced** the left lung and **broke** a rib. The poor lad **must** lie on his **wounded back** or **suffocate**.” 1

*dialog  
Pity/inevitable death  
too busy to cry*

“You don't mean he must die, doctor?” 2  
“There's not the slightest hope for him.” 3

*(emotional appeal to  
Americans who can  
empathize with John)*

I **could have** sat down on the spot and **cried** heartily, if I had not learned the wisdom of **bottling up one's tears for leisure moments**. The army needed men **like John, earnest, brave, and faithful; fighting for liberty and justice with both heart and hand**. 4

*prayer?  
He has time to cry;  
she not  
//*

John sat with **bent head, hands folded** on his knee, and no outward sign of suffering, till, looking nearer, **I saw great tears** roll down and drop upon the floor. It was a new sight there; for, though I had seen **many suffer, some swore, some groaned, most endured silently, but none wept**. Yet it did not seem weak, only **very touching**, and straightway my fear vanished, my heart opened wide and took him in. Gathering the **bent head** in my arms, as freely **as if he had been a little child**, I said, “**Let me help you bear it, John**.” 5

*simile  
Dialog—begin to  
identify with nurse*

Never, on any human countenance, have I seen so swift and beautiful a look of gratitude, surprise and comfort. He whispered, “Thank you, m'am, this is right good! I didn't like to be a trouble; you seemed so busy . . .” 6

*dialog = real John  
//*

I bathed his face, brushed his bonny brown hair, set all things smooth about him. While doing this, he watched me with the satisfied expression I so liked to see. He spoke so hopefully when there was no hope. “This is my first battle; do they think it's going to be my last?” 7

*dialog*

It was the hardest question I had ever been called upon to answer; doubly hard with those **clear eyes fixed upon mine**. “I'm afraid they do, John.” 8

*dialog*

|   |  |    |
|---|--|----|
|   | He seemed a little startled at first, pondered over the fateful fact a moment, then shook his head. "I'm afraid, but it's difficult to believe all at once. I'm so strong it don't seem possible for such a little wound to kill me." And then he said, "I'm a little sorry I wasn't wounded in front; it looks cowardly to be hit in the back, but I obeyed orders."  | 9  |
| <i>(Dialog—real insight into character)</i> |  |    |
| <i>short metaphor imagery</i>               | <b>[John was dying.]</b> Even while he spoke, over his face I saw a gray veil falling that no human hand can lift. I sat down by him, <b>wiped drops</b> from his forehead, stirred the air about him with a <b>slow wave of a fan</b> , and waited to help him die. For hours he suffered dumbly, without a moment's murmuring: his <b>limbs grew cold</b> , <b>his face damp</b> , his <b>lips white</b> , and again and again he <b>tore the covering off his breast</b> , as if the lightest weight added to his agony.  | 10 |
| <i>imagery</i>                              |  |    |
| <i>how to think</i>                         | One by one, the other men woke, and round the room appeared a <b>circle of pale faces and watchful eyes, full of awe and pity</b> ; for, though a stranger, <b>John was beloved</b> by all. "Old boy, how are you?" faltered one. "Can I say or do anything for you anywheres?" whispered another.   | 11 |
| <i>dialog</i>                               |  |    |
| <i>dialog-character obj. short</i>          | "Take my things home, and tell them that I did my best."   | 12 |
| <i>metaphor</i>                             | <b>[He died then];</b> though the heavy breaths still tore their way up for a little longer, short they were but the <b>waves of an ebbing tide that beat unfelt against the wreck</b> . He never spoke again, but to the end held my hand close, so close that when he was asleep at last, I could not draw it away. Dan, another patient, helped me, warning me as he did so that it was unsafe for dead and living flesh to lie so long together. But though my hand was strangely cold and stiff, and four white marks remained across its back, even when warmth and color had returned elsewhere, I could not but be glad that, through its touch, the presence of human sympathy, <b>perhaps had lightened that hard hour</b> . | 13 |
| <i>lasting physical effect</i>              |  |    |
| <i>(reinforces her purpose as a nurse)</i>  | When they had made him ready for the grave, I stood looking at him. The lovely expression which so often beautifies dead faces soon replaced marks of pain. The ward master handed me a letter, saying it had come the night before but was forgot. <b>It was John's letter, come just an hour too late to gladden the eyes that had longed for it so eagerly.</b>   | 14 |
| <i>(ironic detail—sentimental)</i>          |  |    |
| <i>nurse's role</i>                         |  |    |
| <i>how to think of John</i>                 | After I had cut some brown locks for his mother, and taken off the ring to send her, I kissed this good son for her sake, and laid the letter in his hand. Then I left him, glad to have known <b>so genuine a man</b> , and carrying with me an enduring memory of a brave Virginia blacksmith, as he lay serenely <b>waiting for the dawn of that long day which knows no night.</b>   | 15 |
| <i>beautiful metaphor</i>                   |  |    |

### The Opening Paragraph

Remember, your opening paragraph is going to set the subject and tone of your entire essay. Make certain that your reader knows precisely where you intend to take him or her. This clarity of purpose will give your reader confidence in what you have to present. Some of the questions you should ask yourself about your opening paragraph include.



- Have you cited the author and title?
- Have you identified the author's intended effect on the reader?
- Have you specifically mentioned which strategies, devices, or elements you will consider in your analysis of Alcott's re-creation of her experience?

Remember, this information can be provided to your reader in many different ways.

You can be direct or inventive. Whatever you choose to do, be confident and clear.

Below are four sample opening paragraphs that address the prompt for the Louisa May Alcott analysis essay.

We recognized many areas we could develop in this analysis essay. Pacing is obvious in this brief narrative. Alcott tells of her experience in chronological order and uses a combination of short, direct sentences to balance longer, figurative ones. We could have just concentrated on dialog, but we chose to include it with our discussion of selection of detail, diction, imagery, and tone.

### Sample A

In Hospital Sketches, Louisa May Alcott presents a sentimental retelling of an episode she experienced as a Civil War nurse. As she tells of her encounter with a dying soldier, Alcott uses details, imagery, and diction to make her reader emotionally identify with her and her subject. These strategies and devices evoke a sentimental and sorrowful response in the reader.

### Sample B

"John was dying." Such a direct statement for such a tragic and moving event. But, Louisa May Alcott does more than just objectively present a medical report of the death of a Civil War soldier in Hospital Sketches. Rather, through diction, selection of details, imagery, and tone, Alcott emotionally involves her reader in this sentimental re-creation of one young blacksmith's death.

### Sample C

War is hell. But, occasionally an angel of mercy on a mission braves the horror to save a lost soul. Louisa May Alcott, a Civil War nurse, was such an angel—and perhaps her presence helped the troubled soul of a dying blacksmith reach the rewards of heaven he so deserved. Through imagery, diction, selection of detail, and tone, Alcott allows her readers to join her in this sentimental and awe-inspiring narrative from Hospital Sketches.

### Sample D

My only previous connection with Louisa May Alcott was with Little Women. What a very different scene she presents in her story from Hospital Sketches. The reader is made to come face to face with the death of a wounded Civil War soldier as he is tended by a most caring nurse. This moving and sentimental narrative is developed through imagery, diction, selection of detail, and tone.

Although each of these opening paragraphs is different, each does the expected job of an introductory AP Comp analysis essay.

- Each cites the author and title.
- Each identifies the author's intended effect on the reader.
- Each states which strategies/devices will be discussed in the analysis of Alcott's narrative.

Let's take a look at what is different about each of these introductory paragraphs.


- **Sample A** restates the prompt directly. It is to the point without elaboration, but it enables the reader to immediately know the focus of the essay.
- **Sample B** uses a direct quotation from the text to grab the reader's attention. It is obvious that this is a writer who understands how language operates.
- **Sample C** imposes a personal viewpoint immediately and establishes a metaphor that will most likely be the unifying structure of the essay.
- **Sample D** makes reference to one of Alcott's other works as the scene is being set. The writer does not spend any additional time referring to the other work. It merely provides a kind of "stepping-stone" for both the writer and the reader.

Into which of the above samples could your opening paragraph be classified?

## Writing the Body of the Essay

### What Should I Include in the Body of This Analysis Essay?

Your strategy here should be the same as on the previous essay:

- 
1. Present *your* analysis and your prompt-related points.
  2. Adhere to the question.
  3. Use specific references and details from the passage.
  4. Use connective tissue—repetition, "echo words," and transitions—to establish coherence.

For more detail, refer back to the first discussion of this subject, earlier in this chapter.

To understand the process, carefully read the sample paragraphs below. Each develops one of the elements asked for in the prompt and cited in the introductory paragraph. Notice the specific references and the "connective tissue." Also notice that details that do not apply to the Alcott prompt are ignored.

#### This Paragraph Develops Diction

Throughout her account, Alcott's diction manipulates emotional responses in her readers. Words such as "earnest," "brave" and "faithful" establish John as a soldier worthy of sympathy, while "liberty and justice" rally the reader to his side with their patriotic connotations. Once the reader is involved, Alcott directs the tragic scene with words intended to bring forth more negative emotional responses: "suffering, tears, groans, and wept" emphasize John's pain. Yet, when the author says, "very touching," "fear vanished," and "my heart opened wide," the reader also wants to help John bear his pain. Alcott balances the negative side of death by using words that will make the reader more at ease during this uncomfortable passage. "Beautiful, gratitude and comfort" relax the reader and allow him to feel good about Alcott and her caregiving. Then, her direction changes as the young man is dying. He is now "cold, damp, white, and in agony." When the reader's heart is breaking, Alcott chooses words to lift the moment. The other men are "full of awe and pity," like the reader. In this way, the diction unites the reader, John, and Alcott. She makes certain that her concluding choices are comforting and positive. The "hard hour" has been "lightened." His expression is now "lovely and beautiful."



### **This Paragraph Develops Selection of Details**

Louisa May Alcott chooses very special details to include in her development of scene and character. Dialog is one of these details which provides tangible insights into the character of John. The immediacy and reality of John's inevitable death is brought straightforwardly home to the reader in paragraphs 2 and 3. "You don't mean he must die, doctor?" "There's not the slightest hope for him." John's politeness and unassuming personality are observed when we hear him respond to the nurse in paragraph 6. And, his youth and sense of honor are heartbreakingly presented in the dialog in paragraph 7 and the end of paragraph 9. This sense of duty and honor is reinforced with his last words, ". . . tell them that I did my best." Selection of details also help the reader to understand and feel the horror of war and its casualties. The pain and coldness of death is almost brutally punctuated in paragraph 5, where Alcott chooses to emphasize others not crying while John does. Alcott chooses to tell us about the letter from John's mother that was not delivered until after his death to add more pathos and irony to an already tragic scene. And, to select the detail of her placing this letter into the dead soldier's hands prior to his burial heightens the reader's emotional involvement.

### **This Paragraph Develops Imagery**

It might be easy to become dulled to pain in a war hospital filled with dying men. To prevent this and to personalize the experience, Alcott uses imagery to re-create the events of John's death. The reader can feel that "every breath he draws is like a stab." The image of suffocation tightens our throats as we read about his pain, but we, like Alcott, must learn to "bottle up our tears" as we envision through her simile the nurse as mother and soldier as child. The metaphor of "a gray veil falling that no human hand can lift" softens the death of the soldier while heightening the finality. The concluding metaphor reassures the reader of salvation as she, the writer, allows John into the "dawn of that long day which knows no night."

### **This Paragraph Develops Tone**

As a result of her selection of details, diction, and imagery, Louisa May Alcott creates a scene with a predominant tone of sorrow. Re-creating the death scene of this young soldier, the author chooses those details that emphasize that pain and sorrow, both in herself and in her patient. She chooses to tell of the undelivered letter prior to the soldier's death, which further reinforces the reader's sense of sorrow and pity. Words like "suffering," "wept," "cold," "white," "in agony," help to convey and evoke sadness in the reader. And, the piteous situation is further developed when John's face is described as "lovely and beautiful" after his death. Imagery is also employed to create this tone of sorrow or sadness. Images of suffering, loss, and grief throughout, together with the final metaphor of "a gray veil falling that no human hand can lift," sadly portray the passing of this young Virginian blacksmith into eternity.

#### **DO THIS NOW.**

- Write the body of your essay. Time yourself.
- Allow 15–20 minutes to write your body paragraphs.

Here are two actual student essays with comments on each.

### Student A

Louisa May Alcott experiences the worst part of war—suffering. Each day brings her 1  
in contact with new bloodied men brought in on stretchers, and only a few walk out. She  
has to live with their souls on her mind. One soldier, John, is described as a “brave” young  
man who fought for “liberty and justice.” But, he is suffering. Alcott writes with an  
emotional tone about this soldier whom she helps “live” through his final moments. She  
obviously retells this story so that her readers can begin to understand the anguish of war.

This chronologically organized story spans two hours, from life to the end of life. It 2  
is said that no man should die alone, and Alcott helps this young man to die with the  
comfort of one who cares for him. Alcott’s diction includes adjectives to describe his  
slow drift towards heaven with words like “his limbs grew cold, his face damp, his lips  
white . . .” These characteristics added together with the metaphorically imposed “gray  
veil” all lead up to his death. John’s last words, “tell them that I did my best,” symbolize  
both his life and his death. From then on, he said nothing and waited to enter his next  
life. Though he dies, Alcott hangs on as if trying to keep him from leaving. When  
she finally lets him go, four white marks stay on her hand, symbolizing John’s lasting  
presence.

“ . . . Many suffer, some swore, some groaned, most endured silently, but none wept.” 3  
However, John was the exception. He let his emotions go, and his pain was answered  
by a caring nurse. Alcott appeals to the reader’s emotions with such words as “crying,”  
“suffering,” “pity,” and “awe,” that express the extremes of feeling present in the hospital  
ward. A man in pain, about to die, should be pitied, especially when his life is about to  
be cut short. All his childhood dreams are to go unfulfilled. It is a waste of a “genuine  
man.” Alcott uses this not only to tell of her experiences in war, but also to clarify for her  
reader the devastation of war. Alcott’s balanced sentences enhance her story. In paragraph  
7, John says, “This is my first battle; do they think it’s going to be my last?” Alcott  
uses this question to illustrate the shock soldiers feel when faced with death. How can  
anyone believe a doctor who tells him he is dying. This shock, on the part of the soldier  
illustrates the human horror of war—people die!

Alcott also uses irony to emphasize the sadness of this boy’s death. Just an hour after 4  
he passes on, another doctor brings in a letter for John. It is just too late. If he had seen it,  
maybe it would have put one last sparkle in his eyes before he shut them forever.

The ending of the passage summarizes the entire experience of so many of those who 5  
fought in the Civil War. Here was a young man who was very human. He was an average  
boy from Virginia who worked as a blacksmith. He had had a regular life and a regular  
job until this terrible war. That was when this regular life ceased to exist: John’s and pre-  
Civil War America.

Having witnessed this young soldier waiting for the “dawn of that long day which 6  
knows no night,” people should cry and be awe struck at the consequences of war.

## Student B

In this excerpt from Hospital Sketches by Louisa May Alcott, she constructs her story to deeply move the reader by re-creating her personal experience as a nurse. Alcott's rhetorical strategies, including diction, imagery and selection of details, help to emphasize the pain and the sorrow which filled the U.S. Army hospital.

A reason why Alcott's excerpt was very successful in helping the reader understand the atmosphere during the Civil War is through her choice of words. The repetition of "hope," reveals that although she and John hoped that he would survive, it was inevitable that he would die, for he had been deeply hurt. Alcott reveals her sympathy and care for this man named John by asking the doctor how long he has to live. She also helps us understand that during the war precious lives were taken away. "The army needed men like John, earnest, brave, and faithful." Alcott even reveals to her readers that having this companionship with John wasn't an easy job. She would have to answer heartbreaking questions, such as "Do they think it's going to be my last?" Telling a person that they won't live for long may be one of the hardest jobs Alcott may have had.

In addition to Alcott's diction, the details which she presents for her readers give the story an even more melancholy effect. She doesn't simply just state how many men were injured or how they were injured. Rather, she writes about her short encounter with the man named John. "John sat with bent head . . . and no outward sign of suffering, till . . . I saw great tears roll down and drop upon the floor." It's like this simple example shows the sadness and grief felt by this young man who was brave and fought for liberty. She reveals the soft side of a soldier. Alcott re-creates her experience by presenting the details of her relationship with John. "I sat down by him, wiped drops from his forehead, stirred the air . . . waited to help him die." She even displays the gradual physical change of the dying human body. "His limbs grew cold, his face damp, his lips white . . ." She also includes a small conversation between John and another injured man who, although a stranger, still had pity and sympathy for him. She also appeals to emotion by adding his mother in the story. She, as a friend, cuts his hair and kisses him for her instead at the grave.

Furthermore, the use of imagery also added to the re-creation of the Civil War scene. She describes John's pain as "every breath he draws is like a stab; for the ball pierced the left lung and broke a rib." With this quotation, it is evident that his pain was great. Alcott also shows the slow deterioration of John. "I saw a gray veil falling that no human hand can lift." This reveals that John's death is inevitable and there was nothing any human could do, but she could play the role of a friend. Alcott also displays the strength of John, how he wished to live, as "heavy breaths still tore their way up for a little longer."

Alcott describes her experience of the Civil War by telling a personal story. She reveals great love and generosity for John. Through this, it helps us understand the true power of human companionship.



## Rubrics for Alcott Essay

As we said previously in this chapter, you can view actual AP English Language and Composition rubrics by logging on to the College Board website.

### High-Range Essay (9, 8, 7)

- Indicates a complete understanding of the prompt
- Clearly identifies and illustrates the author's intended effect on the reader
- Presents various rhetorical strategies, devices, and elements used by the author to re-create her experience
- Clear, well-organized, and coherent
- Demonstrates a mature writing style
- Thoroughly cites specific references from the text to illustrate and support points being made
- Minor errors/flaws, if any

*Note:* A 7 essay which is rated in the high range makes the jump from the mid-range because of its more mature style and perception.

### Mid-Range Essay (7, 6, 5)

- Refers accurately to the prompt
- Refers accurately to the author's intended effect on the reader
- Presents a less thorough analysis of how Alcott re-creates her experience than the higher-rated essays
- Is less adept at linking strategies and devices to the creation of effect or re-creation of the experience
- Demonstrates writing that is adequate to convey Alcott's assertion
- May not be sensitive to the more subtle strategies employed by Alcott
- A few errors/flaws may be present

*Note:*

- The 7 paper demonstrates a more consistent command of college-level writing than does the 5 or 6 essay.
- A 5 paper does the minimum required by the prompt. It relies on generalizations and sketchy analysis. It is often sidetracked by plot, and the references may be limited or simplistic.

### Low-Range Essay (4, 3, 2, 1)

- Does not respond adequately to the prompt
- Demonstrates insufficient and/or inadequate understanding of the passage and prompt
- Does not clearly identify the author's intended effect on the reader or does not illustrate or supply support for the intended effect
- Underdevelops and/or inaccurately analyzes Alcott's re-creation of her experience
- Demonstrates weak control of the elements of diction, syntax, and organization

*Note:* A 4 or 3 essay may do no more than paraphrase sections of the passage. A 2 essay may merely summarize the passage. (NO MATTER HOW WELL WRITTEN, A SUMMARY CAN NEVER EARN MORE THAN A 2.)

A 1–2 essay indicates a major lack of understanding and control. It fails to comprehend the prompt and/or the passage. It may also indicate severe writing problems.

### Rubrics for Student A Essay

This is a high-range essay for the following reasons:

- Indication of a mature writer [paragraph 2, sentence 3], [paragraph 3, sentences 2 and 3]
- Clear understanding of the author's intended effect on the reader and applies it to a larger context [last paragraph]
- Strong integration of textual support with rhetorical strategies [paragraph 4], [paragraph 5, sentence 1]
- Strong topic adherence and connective tissue
- Interesting and appropriate insights derived from the text [last paragraph]

This high-range essay is well organized, with a strong, mature voice that has a clear point of view together with a well-developed analysis.

### Rubrics for Student B Essay

This is a mid-range essay for the following reasons:

- Identifies the intended effect on the reader [paragraph 1, sentence 1], [paragraph 3, sentence 1]
- Adequately develops cited textual references
- Shows understanding of rhetorical devices [paragraph 4]
- Good transitions (“connective tissue”)
- Frequently uses awkward syntax [paragraph 2, last 3 sentences], [paragraph 3, last 2 sentences]
- Minor technical errors, such as apostrophes and commas

This mid-range essay is indicative of a writer who understands the text and the prompt. The student is able to choose the obvious rhetorical strategies and devices and relate them to Alcott's purpose with less fully developed analysis in comparison with the high-range papers.

## Rapid Review

- Analysis is the study of rhetorical strategies and stylistic elements.
- Your writing reflects your critical thinking.
- Review the types of analysis questions asked on previous exams.
- Always address the prompt.
- Review the rubrics to understand the rating system.
- Remember, the essay on the exam is a first draft.
- Follow a timing strategy for writing the exam essay.
- Carefully analyze the prompt.
- Practice topic adherence.
- Employ close reading and highlighting of the given passage.
- “Work” the material.
- Write your essay and check against models.
- Use echo words.
- Form a study group.
- Read sample essays and rubrics.
- Score your own essays.