

Chapter 1

Flying Over the AP Lit Exam: An Overview

In This Chapter

- ▶ Surveying the important details of the test
- ▶ Exploring possible questions
- ▶ Understanding how the test is scored
- ▶ Taking care of the practical aspects of the exam

It started in kindergarten, right? Someone pushed a pencil into your chubby little hand and said, “This is a test.” All of a sudden you weren’t allowed to talk to your friends, ask a handy grownup for help, or play with that interesting new purple crayon. You left the land where learning was fun and entered Test Land. And you’re still in it! But now the stakes feel higher, especially for the AP, which comes with its own shrink-wrap, barcode labels, student packs, and color-coded sections. The only thing that remains the same is that you still aren’t allowed to talk, ask for most types of help, or play with a cool new crayon.

Regardless of your situation, while you’re in AP English Exam Land you need a map. And you’re in luck because in this chapter, I give you just that. I tell you what to expect — what the test looks like, how long it takes, how to sign up, what it covers, and all sorts of un-fun but useful things.

The Content and Structure of the Exam

When you walk into the test room on a lovely day in May, what kind of questions will you face? Briefly, the College Board hits you with two sections, one for multiple-choice and one for essays. Check out this chart for more details:

Section	Time Allowed	Number of Questions	Details about the Questions
Multiple-choice	1 hour	About 55, give or take a couple	Five potential answers to each question; you interpret five or six pieces of literature that are printed on the exam; selections include poems, maybe a dramatic scene or a slice of memoir, and one or two excerpts from novels
Essays	2 hours	3	Two essay questions are based on a piece of literature (a poem, a passage from a play or novel, and so on) that’s provided on the exam; the third is an open-ended essay based on a work of literary quality that you choose

What to expect if you take an AP English class

Every teacher of AP English has a certain degree of freedom in the design of the course. This is a very good idea, too. In my experience, getting English teachers to agree on something is a little harder than herding cats. Though AP English Literature classes vary, some things remain the same:

- ✔ **An AP English Literature course must, according to College Board rules, throw college-level work at you.** In other words, the course material has to be difficult.
- ✔ **The College Board doesn't mandate a particular reading list, but it does ask that students read a wide variety of literature in the AP class.** By the time you finish your course, the College Board wants you to have read something from every genre and every time period from the 16th century through the present day. Both British and American writers must be on the reading list as well as some translated works. (You don't have to read *everything* in your AP year; you just have to read it sometime.)
- ✔ **All the material is supposed to be of good literary quality, which means writing that rewards close reading.** If you read a work once and you get it all, it isn't AP material. However, if you find something new to think about every time you read a particular work, you've witnessed literary quality. (For more detail on determining whether a work is of good literary quality, flip to Chapter 14.)
- ✔ **Expect the amount of reading to equal or surpass the amount you read in an honors English class.** Ten or 12 full-length works and a good fistful of poetry is what you should expect.
- ✔ **Some AP English teachers start you off with homework for the summer.** You may have to read a couple of books or write something to hand in on the first day of school. Oh, joy!
- ✔ **Expect to write a lot.** In fact, expect to write everything from informal journal entries to polished essays.
- ✔ **The grading may be tougher in an AP class than in a regular, non-AP English section.** Evaluation of your work in an AP course is more stringent because teachers apply college-level standards.

Literary selections on the exam may include anything from Tudor times (16th century) onwards. The selections will most likely be American or British, though works from other English-speaking countries may pop up as well. Literature translated into English from another language is also fair game. One-third to slightly less than half of the literature is usually poetry.



In addition to the time it takes for you to complete the exam, tack on 45 minutes to an hour for getting settled, listening to directions, taking a break, and having your paper collected at the end. Expect to be at the test center for about four hours. (I recommend that you get there 30 to 45 minutes early just to make sure you're registered on time and aren't flustered as the test begins.) When all is said and done, add about two weeks for screaming, "It's over!"

Taking a Closer Look at Typical AP Exam Questions

Hamlet asks, "To be or not to be?" That's probably the most famous question ever asked, but you won't find it on the AP English Literature and Composition exam. After all, who could possibly know the right answer? But you will find questions — lots of them! — when you sit down on AP exam day. This section gathers the usual suspects, the question types that appear year after year, so you can make their acquaintance and ace the test.

The multiple-choice section

The multiple-choice questions, at their easiest, are standard reading comprehension queries. At their most difficult, however, these questions are downright torturous. The exam writers ask you to shoehorn your interpretation of the literary work into one of five choices, none of which may be worded exactly the way you perceive the poem or passage. Somewhere in the middle (in terms of difficulty) are questions that address how the piece is written or the way in which the writing technique and meaning work together. The following sections go over the most common types of multiple-choice questions. For more information on these questions, check out Chapters 6 (poetry) and 11 (prose and drama).

Vocabulary-in-context

The AP English selections are tough, and many times they come with tough vocabulary. Or they may come with common vocabulary that has an obscure meaning. For example, you may see a question like this one:



In the context of line 34, “fall” means

- (A) autumn
- (B) slip
- (C) hit the deck
- (D) attachment of fake hair
- (E) loss of respect or approval

The tricky part here is deciding which meaning appears in line 34, because all of the answers may be definitions of “fall.” Yes, even choice (D). Look it up if you don’t believe me!

Literal meaning

To see whether you can decode complex writing, the exam writers ask you what happened on the simplest, literal level. However, because the exam is supposed to be difficult (and because great writers often employ complex sentences), you may have to untangle complicated *syntax*, the literary term for how the sentence is put together in order to unearth a simple fact. Here’s a type of question you may come across from this category:



The actions of the shopkeeper include all of the following EXCEPT

- (A) faking celebrity autographs
- (B) inserting spinach leaves between chapters 28 and 29 of his rival’s autobiography
- (C) charging a “shipping and handling” fee to customers in the store
- (D) playing annoyingly soft versions of hard-rock classics
- (E) hiring an indie band to promote his store

All you have to do to answer this sort of question is figure out what’s being asked (in this case, the answer that does *not* appear), and then you simply have to go back to the passage and check the facts. However, decoding the passage may turn your hair gray. For help with reading comprehension, turn to Chapter 5 (for poetry) or 9 (for prose and drama).

Tone and diction

Wow, do the exam writers love tone! I don't know why they're so stuck on this topic, but they are. You have to determine whether the passage sounds sad, argumentative, sarcastic, or ironic. Tone often depends partly on *diction*, or word choice (formal, colloquial, and so on). Check out this example:



The tone of the passage may best be characterized as

- (A) nostalgic
- (B) ironic
- (C) descriptive
- (D) speculative
- (E) respectful

As you're reading a passage, hear it in your head and think about the author's language to get a head start on tone. Put those factors together with meaning, and you've got a winner.

Inference and attitude

Inference questions ask you to extend beyond what's stated in the selection. They force you to take the next logical step. You also may be asked to figure out the attitude of the author or of a character or speaker toward a certain topic or issue, based on the clues in the selection. Here's what an inference question might look like:



The shopkeeper is never arrested most likely because

- (A) the cop is involved in the spinach incident
- (B) the cop has a deep-seated fear of spinach
- (C) the shopkeeper's humble assistant has super powers
- (D) everyone in the village loves spinach leaves
- (E) the shopkeeper becomes a superhero, stops time, and removes the evidence

Okay, I played around a little here, but I know you get the point. You have to leap beyond the passage into the territory of probability, using the content of the passage as your guide.

Figurative language

Things aren't always what they seem in literary works. After all, just to make things interesting and to add meaning, authors often employ figurative language. For instance, symbols, metaphors, and similes show up all over the place (including on the AP English exam). Check out this sample question:



The spinach leaves in line 12 may symbolize

- (A) the shopkeeper's love of nature
- (B) the rival's lack of muscle tone
- (C) an unhealthy attachment to vegetables
- (D) death
- (E) the gap between appearance and reality

I threw in choices (D) and (E) because those themes appear nearly everywhere in literature. However, when you answer this sort of question, be sure to focus on the element of figurative language (the symbol, metaphor, or simile, for example) that they're asking about — not just on the piece in general.

Form, structure, and style

Don't expect a ton of multiple-choice questions filled with literary terms describing form, structure, and style. Even though literary terms still appear here and there on the exam, they seem to be falling out of favor in recent years. However, you'll definitely see questions that address *how* the piece is written. Even though you may not see a question about literary terms, it never hurts to be prepared. Take a look at this example:



The style of the fourth paragraph differs from that of the first three paragraphs in that it is

- (A) descriptive, not metaphorical
- (B) argumentative, not descriptive
- (C) symbolic, not literal
- (D) analytical, not metaphorical
- (E) expository, not analytical

Even without the fancy literary vocabulary, these kinds of questions can be tough because you have only a couple of minutes to examine a paragraph or two and figure out which terms apply. To answer this type of question, look at the section of text that the question focuses on and try out the most likely candidates for Answer of the Year. See what fits the text.

The essay section



On the essay portion of the AP English exam, the College Board tests your skills, not your ability to recall information. The questions are designed to determine whether you know how to analyze a literary work and write about it, not to see whether you can name four Romantic poets. Nor do you have to memorize dates or know the names and characteristics of literary movements. In fact, you aren't expected to have any factual stuff stored in your memory except some literary terms. And even then, you don't need to know many of them. You do, however, need to prove that you can do the following:

- ✔ **Relate the way a piece is written to its meaning and its effect on the audience.** Even though they aren't as common in the multiple-choice section of the exam, form, structure, and style questions are frequent fliers on the essay portion. For instance, you may see questions that ask you to comment on the poetic devices that the author employs or to discuss the way in which one element of fiction (setting or characterization, perhaps) contributes to the effect of the piece as a whole.
- ✔ **Provide evidence for your assertions.** Support for your claims is a key element of the essay. When you write the first two essays, you're expected to quote directly from the literary selections provided. You can't easily quote when you write the open-ended essay (unless you have a *very* good memory), but you do need to use details from the work that you're discussing.

The essay questions have what are called *prompts*. These prompts provide a central idea that your essay must address in the context of the literary selection provided or the literary work you've chosen for the open-ended question. You've probably seen prompts in every English class you've ever taken. Here are a few examples: "Discuss the role of friendship in . . .";

“Discuss loyalty to family or country conflicts with personal morality in . . .”; “Discuss the role of figurative language in . . .”; We English teachers manufacture prompts even when we’re sleeping. (Kinda creepy, huh?)

The open-ended essay has a prompt and then a list of suggested works. You can choose one of those works to write about, or you can substitute something of similar quality. Just remember that on the AP English exam, “quality” is *not* your call. The College Board graders decide. Your best bet is to play it safe and choose a work that you studied in school. You can write a winning Pulitzer Prize essay on your favorite Spiderman comic some other time. Check out Chapter 14 for more tips on choosing works for the open-ended essay.

One weird breed of AP English essay is the paired selection. Not every exam has one of these paired essay questions, but many do. The pairs may be two poems, two prose pieces, or one of each genre. They address the same subject or consider the same themes. The prompt asks you to compare and contrast the works. Nervous? Don’t be. Turn to Chapter 15 for help.

All Things Score-Related

When you finish the AP English exam, your job is over, but the scoring gnomes of the College Board are just getting started. The multiple-choice sheets are bundled up and sent through a scanner, and the essays are sent to hotels where they drink margaritas and eat macadamia nuts from the minibar. Okay, I’m kidding about the margaritas and the macadamia nuts, but not about the hotels. Here’s how it works: The College Board hires platoons of high school and college English teachers and sends them, as well as the essays, to hotels. For one fun-filled week, the teachers read and grade all those essays while ingesting vast amounts of caffeine. You knew you wanted to be an English teacher, didn’t you?

Multiple-choice scoring

During multiple-choice scoring, all those darkened ovals made with No. 2 pencil lead flash through a scanning machine, and then out pops a number, which is determined this way:

- ✓ The multiple-choice counts as 45 percent of your final score.
- ✓ Each correct multiple-choice answer receives one point. Questions left blank receive no points.
- ✓ Every wrong multiple-choice answer deducts $\frac{1}{4}$ point. Therefore, it’s best to guess only if you can eliminate a couple of choices.
- ✓ The raw multiple-choice score is converted with a complicated formula that varies slightly from test to test. The College Board has platoons of statisticians who create this formula based on the average number of students who chose the correct answer.

Most students panic a little the first time they try their hand at an AP multiple-choice section. Even excellent readers who can crack a poem at first glance find the multiple-choice questions difficult. Not to worry: Simply practice with this book and you won’t have that initial panic on exam day.



Also, calm your nerves with this information: You can get quite a few multiple-choice questions wrong (10 or even a few more) and still score a five overall, which is the highest score you can get on the exam. Furthermore, the College Board expects that most students will leave some questions blank. After all, the exams have approximately 55 multiple-choice questions, to be answered in 60 minutes. Plus you have to read the selections. Not surprisingly, time is an issue. But remember that it’s an issue for *everyone* taking the test, and the scoring allows for that fact.

Essay scoring

Scoring is always a touchy subject. In fact, fights sometimes break out about which multiple-choice answer is better. Luckily, those fights take place secretly in the College Board headquarters while the exam is being written. Essay fights, on the other hand, occur in public while the tests are being reviewed.

Here's some background on the essay scoring process: The College Board runs workshops on essay scoring for all the teachers hired to slap numbers on your brilliant writing. At those workshops, teachers are given sample student essays to grade as well as a set of very specific standards for grading. Then the fun begins! After they've graded their sample essays, the teachers have to compare the scores that they awarded with the official College Board scores. You probably can't even imagine how passionate people get about one point! (Seriously, English teachers — and I include myself — need to get a life.) After four or five rounds, most graders see what the College Board is looking for, and the room begins to calm down.

Here's the lowdown on essay scoring:



- ✓ **Each essay is given a grade from 0–9.** Nine is the highest score, but anything in the 7-and-up range deserves a pat on the back.
- ✓ **You'll almost always receive at least one point on an essay, just for trying.** The only way to get a zero is to leave the essay blank or to ignore the prompt and write something completely different from what the question is actually asking.
- ✓ **The scoring is holistic.** In other words, the grader doesn't award 10 percent for good writing, 25 percent for evidence, 17 percent for originality, and so on. Instead, the graders simply go through the whole thing once (okay, maybe twice) and select a score they feel is appropriate. Because you can't attend a workshop on grading — and believe me, watching grass grow is more fun — in this book I've created grids to help you arrive at a realistic number. The grids appear in Chapters 17 and 19.
- ✓ **The graders consider the depth of your analysis and the amount and relevance of the evidence that you've provided to back up your ideas.** Basically, they want to see that you can read beyond the literal level and that you can make and support a case for your interpretation.



The graders also look at the quality of your writing. I hate to admit this fact, but grammar and spelling count only if the errors seriously impede the reader from understanding what the writer is trying to convey. The graders are much more interested in writing style — whether your work reads fluently and shows a command of the language.

- ✓ **You can get by in the essay section without using official lit-speak.** All you really need to do is to analyze the material in regular, everyday language. However, your graders are English teachers, and their hearts beat a little faster when they see terms such as *assonance*, *protagonist*, and so forth. Throw them in if you're confident they make sense and connect to a significant point about the literature; leave them out if they don't.



Steer clear of the “laundry list” approach to literary terminology. In other words, don't just work your way through five or six terms, saying that they do or do not appear in the selection. Also, don't define the terms. Your graders are English teachers, so they know what a simile is. Both of these practices waste time and result in lower scores.

- ✓ **Each essay gets two readings by two different graders. Each grader assigns a number. The two essay grades are averaged, and averages that end in 0.5 are rounded up.** If the numbers are more than two apart (one reader awards a 5 and the other awards an 8, for example), a College Board expert steps in to render a final judgment. Essays good enough to receive a 9 — the highest grade possible — are cause for celebration and comments, such as “you have to read this one” and “here's the next Shakespeare.” In fact, the other graders usually pause to read the essay worthy of a 9 — even though they've already read a zillion other essays and are propping their eyelids open with toothpicks.

The envelope, please! Your final score

The multiple-choice and essay scores meet for a drink and . . . sorry, I got carried away with the romance of it all. The scores from each part of the test are weighted so that the multiple-choice counts for 45 percent of your final score and the essays for 55 percent.

Then the statisticians use complicated formulas to convert the multiple-choice and essay scores into a number from 1–5. (I’ve supplied a version of this formula, adapted to the practice exams in this book, in Chapters 17 and 19.) These numbers, according to the College Board, mean the following:

- 5 = extremely well qualified (equivalent to an A in a college course)
- 4 = well qualified (in the B range in a college course)
- 3 = qualified (a C in a college course)
- 2 = possibly qualified (a D in a college course)
- 1 = no recommendation (a failing grade)



As you can probably figure out, colleges don’t give you credit for a 1 or a 2. Even a score of 3 is iffy — some colleges are okay with it, and others aren’t. Some colleges award credit for entry-level courses to those who scored four or five, and others bump you to a higher-level course if you’re in that winning category. If you’re unsure about your prospective school’s requirements, ask its admissions office.

Receiving your score

The minute I take a test I want to know how I’ve done, and I assume you feel the same way. When you take the AP English exam, you have to wait a bit. The exam graders need time to plow through your superlative literary essays. They don’t need too long, though. You take the test in May, and in July the College Board mails your grade to you, to your high school, and to the college of your choice. The first college report is free; if you want more than one, you have to pay a fee. That fee is currently \$15 — or \$25 if you’re in a huge hurry and want expedited service. You can also get your grade over the phone at the beginning of July for a steep \$8 a call.



Here are some important tips to keep in mind:

- ✔ If you had a headache, a breakup, or a crackup on the day of the exam, you can ask the College Board to cancel your score, in which case it disappears forever. (Go to www.collegeboard.com for instructions on how to cancel a score. Or, speak with your school’s AP coordinator.) You have to make your request by mid-June, and you never get to see your score. You don’t pay for score cancellation, but you aren’t reimbursed for your exam fee either.
- ✔ If you want to withhold a score from a particular college, you pay about \$10. Withheld scores still go to your high school and to you, just not to a college. However, they don’t disappear; your score can be sent to a college later if you change your mind — and, of course, if you pay \$15.
- ✔ You can take any AP exam more than once, though you have to wait an entire year to do so because they’re given only in May. Both scores will be reported to your school and to the college(s) you’ve selected. If your first score was pretty bad (say a 2), you may want to withhold that score from prospective colleges.

For a fee (what else is new?) you can get your essay answer booklet back to review with a teacher or tutor before you try the AP again. The booklet will have no teacher comments on it, just a score. The deadline for this service is mid-September, and the cost is currently \$7.

Check out the College Board Web site (www.collegeboard.com) or call 888-225-5427 for information, score reports, cancellations, and so forth.

Dealing with the Practical Stuff

If you're taking an AP English course, your teacher will probably tell you everything you need to do in order to sign up for the exam. However, if you're home schooled or not in an AP class (or if your English teacher has inhaled a little too much chalk dust), this section will help you. Here I explain the practical aspects of the test, including registering, getting score reports, fee waivers, accommodations for special needs, and so on. Because the AP exam has stranger procedures than a super-secret spy agency, I also explain candidate packs, seals, shrink wraps, and other annoying stuff so you won't be surprised on test day.

Signing up

In the winter of the academic year in which you plan to take the exam, pick up a College Board student bulletin. The College Board issues these pamphlets to give you the date of the test, registration materials, deadlines, and information on fees. You can get the student bulletin from your school's AP Coordinator (who may be identified by the worried look and hurried stride of someone who has way too much to do). In many schools, the AP Coordinator is a college or guidance counselor. If you aren't sure who has the student bulletins, check with the principal or with your English teacher.



You can also find AP information, including a downloadable student bulletin, on the College Board's Web site, www.collegeboard.com/apstudents. You can't sign up on line, but you can find out where and how to register for the test. No Internet access? Not to worry. Call the College Board at 888-225-5427 for registration information. As long as you're on the Web site, take a look at the practice exams and sample questions the test-writers provide.

AP exams aren't cheap; currently you have to plunk down \$83 for one test. You pay in advance to the AP Coordinator at your school. You may also face extra fees if you want extra score reports. (See the section "Receiving your score" earlier in this chapter for more details on these extra fees.)



If the test fee is a stretch for your wallet, ask the AP Coordinator about reduced fees. In general, the price drops to \$53 for those in financial need. Sometimes the federal or state government provides additional funds to defray the cost of the test.

If you aren't currently attending a high school (you're returning after time away or you're home-schooled), call the College Board AP Services no later than the end of February (888-225-5427). They will put you in touch with the nearest AP Coordinator. Be sure to contact the coordinator as soon as possible, and no later than mid-March. Tell the coordinator that you want to take the AP English Literature and Composition exam, and notify him or her of whether you have any special accommodations (more on accommodations later in this chapter). The coordinator will give you a list of schools offering the AP English exam and will

order an exam for you. The coordinator will also collect your fee and give you a code number, which is different from the general number used by students attending the school where the test is given. Be sure to bring a government-issued photo ID (passport, driver's license, or a similar official document) and your code number with you on test day. (See the yellow tear-out card at the front of this book for a list of items to bring along on the big day.)

Being mindful of important deadlines



You can't be late for a couple of very important dates in connection with the AP English exam and still be sure that you have everything you need — permission to take the exam, accommodation (if allowed), and so forth. Here are the basics:

- ✓ **Early February:** If you need accommodations on the exam (extra time, Braille or large-type text, and so forth) and you haven't yet been certified, need a change in certification, or have changed schools, now is the time to submit documentation to the College Board.
- ✓ **Late February:** If you need accommodations and have been certified by your school already, you still have to check that the correct forms have been sent to the College Board. Ask your guidance counselor, principal, or AP coordinator whether the correct forms have been mailed.
- ✓ **Early March:** If you're a home-schooler or a student in a school that doesn't offer the AP program, you must contact the College Board for the name and phone number of an AP Coordinator who can arrange the exam for you. Also, all test takers need to get a government-issued photo ID. If you don't have one, get one now.
- ✓ **Beginning of April:** If you're enrolled in an AP English Lit course and you don't need accommodations, check with your teacher for the time and place of the exam. Find out when the fee is due and determine which school official will collect it.

I can't supply exact dates because they vary slightly from year to year. Check out www.collegeboard.com/apstudents for more information. No Internet connection? Call 888-225-5427 for details.

Showing up: What to expect on test day

On test day, expect to have a nervous breakdown. Just kidding! If you've spent some quality time with this book, you should be in great shape to do well on the exam. Here's what to expect.

Upon arrival

When you arrive at the test center, your teacher or a *proctor* (an adult who monitors the test) will direct you to the correct room. You'll be asked to leave everything in a locker or storage area except for what you actually need for the test. (Check out the yellow tear-out sheet at the beginning of this book for permitted items.) Usually exam-takers are asked to wait outside the testing room until the proctor is ready. Then you rush inside. Oops! I mean you calmly, confidently stroll into the room. Allow about a half hour before the official start time of the test for pre-exam visits to the restroom, locker room, padded room, and so forth.

In the classroom, before the exam

After you're in the room, you have to be quiet. No last minute whispers about Emily Dickinson, the Beatles, or the party next week. Any hint of cheating and you're gone, so be careful to maintain silence and to limit your field of vision to the proctor, your watch, and the ceiling.



Before the exam begins, the proctor gives you a *student pack*. The student pack, also known as the *candidate pack*, has bar-coded, self-stick labels that identify you and your test materials. If you're taking more than one AP exam, the proctor will take the student pack at the end of every exam except the last, at which point you can take it home and frame it. Okay, well, actually you use the ID number on that pack to get your scores over the phone. Don't throw it away until you know how you did.

The proctor also distributes answer sheets. At this point, you have to take an ID label from your student pack and stick it on the answer sheet. Then you answer some easy questions, such as your name, address, and so forth. (Some schools take care of these tasks ahead of time, just to save test-day energy for the things that count. Others sweat you through it right before the exam.)

At this time, the proctor will also distribute the exam, which is wrapped in clear plastic, and he or she will read some legal notices. What these legal notices basically mean is that when you open the plastic package you accept the College Board's right to investigate if it thinks you or anyone you know on this planet has cheated. You also give the College Board the right to use your answers for any purpose it wants. No one will recite your essay on *American Idol*, but your work may be used in one of the College Board's publications as, perhaps, a sample to train graders.

You're getting closer to being ready to begin the exam, but you aren't quite there yet. You still need to copy the name of the test and the form number (it's on the test booklet) onto your answer sheet. You also have to read the legal stuff on the front and back covers of your exam and then sign your name, indicating that you accept the terms. By accepting these terms, you agree not to cheat, not to talk about the multiple-choice questions *ever* (they reuse some), and not to divulge the essay questions for a few days.

During the exam

After you finish the multiple-choice section, you seal the question booklet with little stickers that are in your student pack. The proctor then collects the question booklets and answer sheets, and you get a ten-minute break (during which you're pretty much in solitary confinement, though you can sprint for a bathroom if necessary). You aren't allowed phone calls or conversation about the questions.

During the second part of the exam, you return and open the next plastic-wrapped package. This pack contains a green question sheet and a pink answer sheet. Now you get to listen to all the legal stuff again, write your name and stick a few more bar-coded labels on the booklets, and then compose your essays. Two hours later, you hand in the whole thing and begin to breathe again. You're done!

Life happens: What to do if you can't take the exam

If you wind up sick on test day, chances are good that nothing terrible will happen if you can't take the exam. If you have the sniffles or a once-in-a-lifetime chance to play in the state championship softball game, simply tell your AP Coordinator. He or she will arrange for an exam during the makeup week, which is the first week following the usual AP period — in other words, around the third week in May. If you're out for more than that (you couldn't make bail, fell terribly ill, or got stranded on an island with polar bears and mysterious hatches), you're out of luck. You have to wait until next year, and you have to pay the fee all over again.



Before you give up, however, check with your AP Coordinator. He or she may be able to arrange a last-minute accommodation (perhaps extra time for someone with a sprained wrist) that will save the day.

Dealing with special needs

Students with special needs can take the AP English exam, and many do. Depending on your situation, you may be entitled to extra time, a computer (for those with *dysgraphia*, which is an impairment that causes you not to be able to write), large-type or Braille exams, a reader for the questions, or a writer to take down your answers.



If you need accommodations, the AP Coordinator in your high school should take care of everything; home-schoolers or those not enrolled in a school that has an AP program can get help from the AP Coordinator in their area. (See the earlier section, “Signing up,” for more information on finding an AP Coordinator.) The College Board’s Services for Students with Disabilities Office is another good resource. Contact the office at 609-771-7137 (TTY 609-882-4118). You can also e-mail the office at ssd@collegeboard.org. Or, check the Web site for more information (www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html).

The school has to fill out and submit a “Services for Students with Disabilities Eligibility” form, affectionately known as the SSDE. In general, after the College Board has certified you as needing accommodations on one of its exams (the SAT, for example), you’re certified for all. However, if anything changes — your address, your school, your physical or mental ability — you need a new form.



The school has to do the work here, but you’re the one who’s ultimately responsible for making sure that the SSDE is in proper shape, in the proper hands, at the proper time. The deadlines are in February or March before the exam, with the earlier date for students who are being certified for the first time and the later date for those who have been through the ordeal before. Check with your AP Coordinator well before that time to be sure everything’s in order and to find out the exact dates.