



Ruben S. Ayala High School

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Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your son/daughter is currently enrolled in Language and Composition (English 11 Advanced Placement). My hopes in writing this letter are to open the lines of communication, answer some questions that you may have, and put your mind at ease a little.

Background:

The Language and Composition class is designed to provide a college-level Freshman Composition class to students still in high school. The rigor is dictated and monitored by a governing body known as the College Board. The College Board is a group of college professors (many from the University of California system). You can read more about them on the College Board's website (an excellent resource for PSAT, SAT, and AP information): www.collegeboard.com. The class is designed to be at a level acceptable for what are known as tier one schools, including Harvard, Yale, and Stanford (to name a few). The way that the College Board assesses a student's development of college-level writing and reading skills is through a test taken in May. If a student can successfully pass the test, they can receive college credit. Passing by Collegeboard's standard is a 3 or better on a 5-point scale (each college has its own requirements for what score it will accept for college credit and such information can be found on individual college websites).

Benefit:

According to College Board's website, a letter that I have from UCLA's admissions, and from my own experience, students who have taken AP courses are more successful in college whether they pass the AP exam or not. Taking a college-level class in high school allows the student to understand college rigor yet still be in the comfort of home. Additionally, if the student is successful in passing the AP exam (with a score of 3 or better on a 5 point scale), he/she can earn college credit. Therefore, parents and guardians have spent the *\$89.00 required for the test rather than the hundreds of dollars a college class will cost. *Financial help is available for students who are currently enrolled in the Free or Reduced Lunch program.

Warnings:

Language and Composition is a skills class. Although the students are still in high school physically, this is not a high school English class. This class is designed to provide college rigor to high school students. This of course means that the students will need to learn to read and write at a level two years beyond where they would normally be at the end of a 10 Honors English class. It is important to note that the grades in this class are not based on ability to complete work. The grades are based on the ability to master skills at a college level. Therefore, early in the year, most students will have grades far below what you, as the parent/guardian, are used to seeing. However, the class is designed with greater points awarded at the end of the semester and the end

of the year. So it is very probable that your son/daughter could have a D or even an F by the six weeks' grading period, but still receive a B or an A in the class by the end of the semester.

I completely understand that parents/guardians do not want to see their child struggle. In fact it is usually far more comfortable for all parties involved if the parent/guardian can shield children from as much discomfort, stress, and frustration as possible. However, in the case of taking a college-level class while still in high school, there are bound to be moments of struggle. I, in addition to being their teacher, coach, guide, and assessor, will also be a constant cheerleader trying to get them to understand that the task is difficult not impossible. I am truly hoping that you can play that role too.

I assure you that my intention is not to assign massive amounts of work. There will however be assignments that require a lot of time. There will also be assignments that students find mentally draining. However, if students plan accordingly, even if they are involved in sports, band, choir, or other activities, they can get everything done without having to stay up late into the night or early into the next morning. It is important though that you understand oftentimes some students procrastinate and wind up doing things last minute. This is not because the assignment was given without proper notice.

Grading:

As previously stated, this is a skills class. Students' timed write (in-class writing assignments) are scored against a College Board rubric. It is important that student know where they are in relation to the skills that are required. I know I have said this numerous times, but it is important to remember that this is a college-level English class, so many students entering are not prepared to read and write at the level needed. As also previously stated, most students do not receive high marks early in the year because it is early in the process. Once they have developed their skills, more points can be earned and some assignments can be rewritten. The beginning marks are important in the skills development process. Students always improve. Even students who endure unbelievable struggles in the beginning of the year, see incredible improvement in their writing and reading skills by the end of the year.

While I would love to give every assignment that is turned in extensive feedback, I cannot. Collegboard has said that an AP class should ideally have about twenty-five students in a class. However, the reality is that AP classes almost always have thirty-five students and sometimes more. There is even a possibility of that number going up in our district. So with that said, there will be times that timed writes are given as a skills practice and will receive credit rather than assessment. Also, some homework assignments will be given credit rather than assessment.

Unfortunately there has been an increase in the number of students who will cheat rather than complete the assignment on their own. While the Internet is a wonderful resource, it has also become a place where students can easily download answers. For that reason, it is necessary to give only credit for homework rather than assessment. If a student is doing the work, the results will be apparent in their timed writes and ultimately on their AP test. If a student is simply copying the work, he/she has completely missed the point of taking this class. This is not a class where imposters can be successful.

Homework and credit only assignments make up a small percentage of the student's overall grade. Eighty percent of a student's grade comes from timed writes and take home essays.

Final Thoughts:

Students can absolutely be successful in this class. If a student has academic curiosity and a willingness to work hard, they have the most important elements required. I am in this profession

because I love students first and love Language Arts second. It is my ultimate goal to help your son/daughter be successful. While it is painful for me to see parents, and more importantly students get frustrated with the process, I know students can be more successful than they even thought possible with a little bit of perseverance. Please contact me with any concerns.

Sincerely,

Alexis Sjol

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email: alexis_sjol@chino.k12.ca.us – when emailing me, please include your son/daughter's name in the subject line.