

# An In-Depth Look at the Synthesis Essay Question

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- Preparing for the AP Language and Composition Exam

# Introduction to the Essay Questions

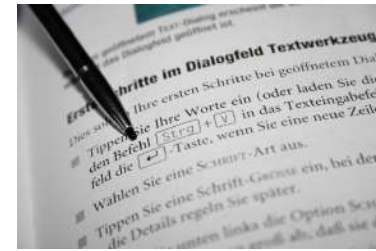
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- At first you will receive only the green booklet, and you will get 15 minutes to read the material and plan your essays.
- Spend your 15 minutes well.
- At the conclusion of the 15 minutes, you will be given a pink booklet.
  - At this point you have two hours to write three essays



# Scoring/Rubric

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- To simplify the rubric, the graders are primarily looking for three elements:
  - Did the student answer the question?
  - Did the writer's point remain clear?
  - Did the student use examples?

## Did the student answer the question?

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- Make sure to address the prompt.
- Just because it is eloquently written does not guarantee you staying on topic.
- Be vigilant of this



# Did the writer's point remain clear?

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- There should be no confusion or uncertainty
- Your argument should be clear from the first point through the conclusion.
- Be weary of fancy words. Graders prefer a good idea that is expressed with the diction most relevant to the essay.



# Did the student use examples?

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- You absolutely must include a minimum of three quotations in the synthesis essay.
- If you do not have **specific** examples, your essay will receive no more than a lower half score (1-4)



# Scoring

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- In addition to those three essential elements, there are two more:
  - Grammar
    - Graders expect you to be grammar fluent (but not necessarily perfect)
  - Voice
    - Avoid dull writing
    - Avoid the five-paragraph mold
    - Have your own style, but don't become so fixated on the beauty of your essay that you forget to answer the question

# The Synthesis Essay

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- The synthesis essay has a triple purpose.
  - It examines your ability to consider and support a rational argument.
  - It also seeks to evaluate your ability to absorb, understand, and employ several sources on the same topic.
  - It tests your ability to correctly cite the sources you have quoted or paraphrased in your argument.



# The Process

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- It is strongly recommended that you use the 15 minute reading period to immediately look at the synthesis passages.
- If there is time left over, read and make notes on the rhetorical analysis piece and argument question.

# The Process

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- Read the initial question page carefully. There are three sections.
  - (1) ***Direction***: in this section you will find this crucial sentence: *Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument. Avoid merely summarizing sources.*
  - Your opinion is the most important aspect of this essay (therefore form one!)
  - The sources you present in your argument are there to support and sustain your own ideas.

# The Process

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## ○ Beware:

- If you simply repeat what the sources had to say about the issue, you will always earn a lower-half score (1-4).
- This means that bringing your own examples to a synthesis essay is a good idea.
  - It's not essential, but it does help demonstrate to the reader that you are presenting your own argument.

# The Process

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- Read the initial question page carefully. There are three sections
  - (2) **Introduction:** its purpose is to get you thinking about the issue by making general statements about the topic.
    - The introduction is **not** the prompt
  - (3) **Assignment:** this is where you will find the prompt. The topic is hi-lighted in bold print.
    - Additionally, the assignment (prompt) will state that you must “synthesize at least three of the sources for support.”

# Dealing with the Passages and Visuals

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- Identify certain elements right away such as:
  - Is the source biased?
    - You can determine this by looking at the source itself – an article from *Christian Century* will have some inherent biases.
  - Does the source's date of publication have an effect on the relevance of the argument?
    - A passage written in 1975 about advertising is likely to be out of date today.
  - What position does the author hold?
    - Determine if the author is for, against, or neutral about the topic.
  - For what audience is the author writing?
    - Identify the target audience for the piece: women, men, businesspeople, etc.



# Dealing with the Passages and Visuals

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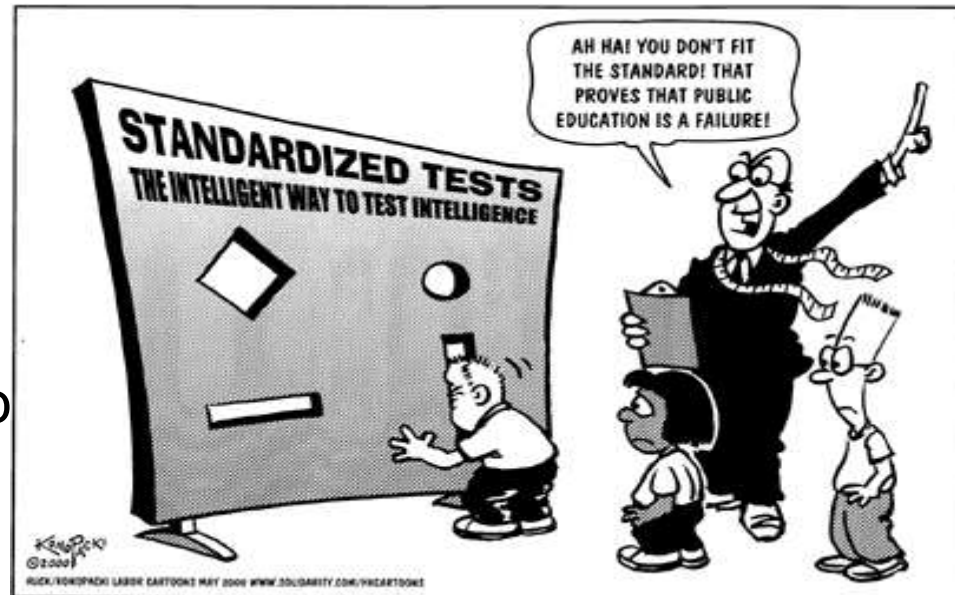
- You should critically mark and annotate the passage by identifying three things:
  - What is the point of view, thesis, or information offered?
  - Are there any “quotables” – particularly succinct (short; concise) or stimulating phrases – you can use?
  - Do you plan to use the piece or a portion of it to support your argument in some way?
    - You may decide this question after reading all or most of the passages – you are looking for three **good** ones.



# The Visual

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- It may take the form of a chart, table, photograph, political cartoon, or painting.
- You should follow the same steps for analyzing the visual as you do when annotating the passages:
  - Look for bias
  - Datedness
  - Position
  - Audience
  - Point of view
  - And usefulness to your argument



# Using Opposing Passages

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- It is always a good strategy to use passages that disagree with your point of view, especially if you are dealing with an “agree, disagree, or qualify\*” prompt.



- \*Qualifying an argument allows room for reflection and interpretation and is crucial to creating a strong ethos.
  - Categories of qualification:
    - **Quantity:** many, most, some
    - **Frequency:** often, usually, frequently
    - **Probability:** probably, unlikely
    - **Proof:** suggests, indicates, points to





# One More Warning

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- Beware: do not put in so many quotes that the grader cannot find **your** argument.



# Practice Activity

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- Take 55 minutes to read the sources and respond to the essay.
- We will go over the scoring rubric when time is called.

- *(Pg. 99-105)*

