

NOVATO HIGH SCHOOL

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June 1, 2009

Dear Student,

AP English Language and Composition is a college-level course approved by the College Board as **the equivalent of freshman English at virtually any four-year college or university in the United States**. It is designed to prepare students for the College Board's AP English Language and Composition exam in May. A passing or higher grade on this exam exempts students from freshman English classes at many colleges and universities across the country.

Novato High School embraces the College Board's open admissions policy for AP courses. However, you should know that because this is a college course, **exceptionally strong skills in reading and writing are necessary for success in this course**. If you scored 420 or above in Reading on last year's STAR test, you have a good chance of success in AP Language. A lower score suggests you may not be prepared to take an AP English course at this time. If you have consistently gotten As in English classes and your current English teacher believes you are ready to take an AP course, you also have a good chance of success.

Students who scored less than 420 on last year's STAR test, who have earned less than an A in sophomore English, or whose English teacher does not recommend taking an AP course would be well advised to take English 11, an excellent course in American Literature, instead of AP Language and Composition.

In addition to being academically prepared to take an AP English course, you must also have the desire to take a rigorous and challenging college-level course. Enrolling in AP Language because your parents want you to take the course or because you think the course will help get you into a good college are two good reasons NOT to take this course.

Please DO take this course if you

- have strong skills in reading and writing
- like reading
- are interested in exploring language and ideas in depth and detail
- want to participate in vigorous, intellectual class discussions on many issues
- enjoy a challenging environment in which you are expected to produce
- are prepared to put forth your best effort all the time
- are willing to commit to at least an hour a day preparing for class, and often more
- are not so busy that you will not be able or willing to make this class a high priority

Please DO NOT take this course if you

- are primarily interested in getting an extra grade point or getting all As
- feel you need to take the course to be competitive
- enrolled because parents or friends think you should take the course
- are involved in activities or other classes that might intrude on time needed for this class
- are not interested in in-depth, detailed reading of college-level reading material
- do not feel you are ready to tackle college-level reading material

This class is designed to expand and develop students' reading, thinking, and writing skills.

It is a rewarding but demanding course. **Students are expected to consistently perform at high levels.** I heartily welcome all students committed to taking on such a challenge. If you are not enthusiastic about the work, please see your counselor immediately to request a change to English 11.

Here are your assignments in more detail:

Because the AP exam is in early May, we begin our study in the summer. Work includes 1) grammar study for a test the first week of school; 2) reading one book and three essays, and taking detailed notes to submit in August; and 3) a six-page paper due the first day of class.

Required text: *Holt Handbook: Grammar, Usage, Mechanics, Sentences*
Fifth Course, 2003 (2007 printing)

Come to Room 2301 as soon as possible to get your copy. Familiarize yourself with the contents and arrangement of the book. Study Chapter 5, "Agreement"; Chapter 6, "Pronouns"; and Chapters 13-14 on "Punctuation." Expect a test on this material the first week of class in August.

Part Two: (Reading)

Read and take detailed notes on all three essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Nature," "Self-reliance," and "The American Scholar."

Read and take detailed notes on **one** of the following books:

Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, 2008

Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, 2008

Emerson's essays are available in many paperback editions. Both books are also available in paperback. Whichever book you choose, make sure you allow ample time for thoughtful, careful reading. Take detailed notes on what is most important and why. Turn in your notes the first day of class.

Part Three: (Essay)

Write a six-page paper that identifies and explains several things you learned from Emerson's essays and the book you read that have important implications for society today. **Be sure to emphasize YOUR ideas, not the author's, but use specific points from the essays and the book to support your ideas about their relevance to today.**

Plan your essay carefully to demonstrate to the reader your thoughtful, intelligent, detailed analysis. Edit, revise, and proofread carefully. Essays should be free of errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Essays thrown together at the last minute are not acceptable. If this is your approach to essay writing, you would be well advised not to take this course.

Follow **carefully** the format shown in the chapter on "Manuscript Form" on pages 506-508 in the *Holt Handbook*.

The essay is due at the beginning of the period on the day of our first class meeting in August.

I have attached a sheet of guidelines to help you write your essay. Please refer to these guidelines at the beginning, sometime in the middle, and as you near the end of your summer work. I have put it together to help you write the best essay you can, and to make your essay one I will enjoy reading.

I look forward to your insightful, provocative, well-written essays. Submission of this essay on the first day of class is mandatory. Late work is not acceptable on this or subsequent essays.

Happy reading!
Cordially,
Deborah Thompson
English teacher

HOW TO WRITE A GREAT SUMMER ESSAY

The best essays show an intelligent mind **thinking, stating, developing, proving, crafting**.

Thinking—Make sure your essay is the result of your best thinking about the issue. Don't skim the surface. Dig deep. Ask questions, taking time to analyze all aspects of the issue. Don't even think about starting to write until you know you have something important to say.

Stating—Make your points clearly and precisely in language that is natural and appropriate to both subject and audience. Don't strain for effect or try to be someone or something you're not. Use the right word, not the fanciest, and make sure every word counts. Clarity and precision are the goal.

Developing—Always explain *how* and *why*. Don't assume that because a point is obvious to you that it will be obvious to the reader. Your job is to explain in as much depth and detail as needed. Keep general statements to a minimum. Be specific.

Proving—Every assertion requires proof. You need detailed evidence to persuade your reader that what you say is true. What convinced you? Use that evidence to convince your reader.

Crafting—Pay as much attention to *how* you say something as you do to *what* you say. The mind of the writer meets the mind of the reader on the page. Therefore, you need to structure, organize, and write carefully. Pay as much attention to details of language as you do to content. Form is the vehicle for content. This means at the most basic level that grammar, spelling, and punctuation are correct. More important, ideas must be structured and organized logically. Each paragraph should fully develop *one* idea. Each sentence should clearly state *one* point. Every word, phrase, and clause should work together seamlessly to achieve your overall purpose—to prove your thesis. This means revision, revision, revision. Even the best writers require several drafts to get it right. There are no shortcuts to good writing.

Make sure the mechanics of your writing show knowledge of grammar, spelling, and punctuation and careful attention to detail. The *Holt Handbook* is a handy guide, whether you use the table of contents or the index.

- 1. Noun/Pronoun agreement**—Never use “they” for a singular antecedent. A person is “someone,” not “they.” Although use of “they” to refer to a singular antecedent is fairly common in informal conversation, it is not standard written English.
- 2. Pronoun reference**—Whenever you use “it,” make sure the antecedent is a singular noun or noun phrase the reader can clearly and unambiguously identify.
- 3. Subject/verb agreement**—Subjects and verbs are the heart of every sentence. Don't let intervening words (prepositional phrases or other modifiers) affect the form of the verb.
- 4. Comma use**—Commas can have an important effect on meaning. Make sure you know why you use each comma; make sure you don't use unnecessary ones.
- 5. Other punctuation, especially apostrophe, quotation marks, colon, semicolon, dash, hyphen**—Review the rules. If you are uncertain, look it up! Two hyphens = one dash on the keyboard.
- 6. Paragraphing**—Each paragraph is a mini-essay, with its own thesis (topic sentence) that is developed and proven. Indent each new paragraph using the one-inch tab. Don't use extra

spacing between paragraphs.

7. Use quotations, don't insert them—Exact words of others may provide good evidence, but you need to discuss what you quote, not use quoted material as substitutes for your own words or thoughts. Therefore, never end a paragraph with a quotation.

8. Set off long quotations—If you must quote more than four lines, set off and indent the quotation, and produce it exactly as shown in the original, with no added quotation marks.