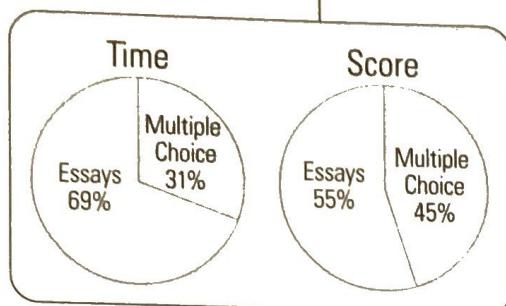


WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE SECTION

The multiple-choice section counts for 45 percent of your total score, but you're given only 31 percent (1 hour) of the total exam time to earn that large chunk of points. How you spend that hour is extremely important.



The multiple-choice portion of the exam consists of five passages and 45 questions. There will be 23–25 Reading questions and 20–22 Writing questions. All multiple-choice questions will be scored by computer. All five passages will be nonfiction. Two of them will be publication-quality passages and associated with Reading questions. These passages will range from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Three of the readings will be student-level passages and associated with Writing questions. These passages will be examples of contemporary, persuasive writing. Our practice tests include examples of each type

of passage and style of question, just like the real exam, so that you will be ready by the time you get to the test.

“Nonfiction” is a very broad term, so you could find Reading passages taken from all sorts of works—essays, biographies, diary entries, speeches, letters, literary criticism, science and nature writing, and writings about politics or history. The passages will also run the gamut as far as types of diction (word choice), syntax (how words are combined into phrases and sentences), imagery, tone, style, point of view, and purpose.

The Reading questions emphasize not just *what* the author is saying, but especially *how* the author says it. The idea is to get you to focus on rhetorical devices, figures of speech, and intended purposes, under rigid time constraints and with material you haven't seen before. You'll need to identify rhetorical devices and structures in a passage, and understand why and how the author used them. (Review Chapters 8–11 to learn more about rhetorical strategies. You'll find this helpful for the rhetorical analysis essay too.) The Reading questions are a challenging opportunity to demonstrate your ability to analyze how writers use language to achieve their purposes.

In the Reading passages, you may also find some questions about citations, which are usually presented as footnotes to the passage. Citations often give credit to sources from which the passage author drew ideas or information. The citation could state a source's date and place of publication, which might be important in evaluating that source. (For example, a very old source might be questionable if there have been more recent discoveries about a topic.) Citations can also supplement information in the passage without cluttering up the main text with details that might distract readers.

The Writing questions will ask you to evaluate passages of student-level persuasive writing. The questions are likely similar to peer-review exercises you've done in English classes over the course of your high school experience. Questions might ask you to select an ideal introductory sentence, revised thesis statement, or a piece of evidence that would enhance the writer's argument. Questions will also ask you to consider concessions, counterarguments, and rebuttals. Though the writing in these passages is simpler than in the Reading passages, you'll have to think critically about the argument being presented and any potential flaws therein.

Bonus Tips and Tricks...

Check us out on YouTube for additional test-taking tips and must-know strategies at www.youtube.com/ThePrincetonReview.

So where do you start preparing to get that much done in such a short time? In this chapter, you'll find techniques for reading the passages and answering multiple-choice questions that will allow you to confront the conditions of the exam head-on.

Active Reading

The passages on the exam are often heavy reading; older nonfiction passages can contain long sentences and obscure words that were common at the time. Read quickly but with understanding. If you just skim through the passage, you will likely have to keep rereading parts to gain a sense of what the author is talking about. You want to thoroughly comprehend the material from the start.

The solution? Active reading. That means you take control of the passage instead of simply letting it pour sentences and paragraphs into your head. Engage with it.

As you read each paragraph, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the author's main point in this paragraph?
- How does it connect to the paragraph that came before it?
- Where is it likely to lead in the next paragraph?

At the end of the passage, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the author's "big picture" purpose and main point in this passage as a whole?
- Did the author convince me? Interest me? Lead me to disagree strongly? How did the author achieve that effect on me as a reader?
- What impact would this passage likely have had on readers who lived when it was written? What techniques did the author use to achieve that effect?

You can practice this type of active reading with any written material—textbooks, printed ads, or product descriptions, for example. Once you get into the habit, you'll find that your reading comprehension increases considerably, along with your critical thinking skills. With enough practice, active reading will be second nature to you by the time you encounter the AP English Language and Composition Exam passages, where it's a necessity if you're to wade through most, if not all, of the questions and answer them successfully.



Active Reading

Look for the main point of the passage, the author's purpose, and the rhetorical strategies used to achieve that purpose.



Words in Context

Guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word from its context.

Words in Context

Chances are you'll encounter some unfamiliar words on the exam, particularly in the nonfiction Reading passages. Another active reading technique can take you over that hurdle too: guessing the meaning of a word from its context. For example, let's say the passage is describing a politician who is trying to sell an unpopular new law to the voters in his constituency.

The speaker's passion and ebullience began to cut through the dour mood of the audience that confronted him.

If you have no idea what "ebullience" and "dour" mean, you can still figure them out from the context. The speaker is passionate about this law he's trying to promote, so—paired with "passion"—"ebullience" must have something to do with enthusiasm and excitement. The voters, on the other hand, don't like it at all, so "dour" must signify something opposite—gloomy, unreceptive. The word even sounds dark and unfriendly.

Guessing a word's meaning from its context is something you can practice on material you encounter in your daily life. Then you can check a dictionary or thesaurus to see how your skill is improving.



Don't Play Mind Games

Your memory will fool you.
Always go back to the passage.

Tackle the Questions and Go Back to the Passage

Each question is setting a specific task for you. Make sure you understand exactly what it's telling you to do. Read the question stem carefully, word for word.

When a question refers to specific lines in the passage, always go back to the passage and reread them. You should also read a few lines before and after the specified lines; context is often critical in determining the correct answer.

Relying on your memory—particularly in the dense nonfiction works you'll encounter on the exam—can easily lead you astray. Sometimes a sneaky answer choice will start out partly correct, but then make a U-turn into something that is not supported by the passage. Don't let your memory lead you into the trap of picking an answer that starts out right but is ultimately incorrect. Remember, half wrong is all wrong.

POE—Process of Elimination

After you understand the question task and have gone back to the passage to review the lines it specifies, look at the answer choices. Your active reading, careful analysis of the question task, and rereading of specific lines will most likely show you at least a couple of answer choices that are clearly wrong. Now instead of four possible answers, you have only three or perhaps two, and your chances of choosing—or even guessing at—the correct answer just went up substantially.

So start there—by quickly getting rid of choices that are obviously wrong—instead of starting by puzzling through four possible answers looking for the one right choice. That’s the Process of Elimination approach, and it will increase your success rate on multiple-choice questions significantly.

Main Steps of POE

First, eliminate the answers you know are wrong. Then, look for the right answer within the remaining choices.

Guessing and the Letter of the Day

So you’ve tossed out two clearly wrong answers using POE, and narrowed four possible choices down to two. Suppose you still can’t tell *which* of those three is the correct answer, though.

What do you do? Two things: guess and use the Letter of the Day.

Guessing

You get no points for a question that you don’t answer. The good news with this exam, though, is that you don’t lose any points for incorrect answers. So answer every single question, even if your answer is a guess. By using POE, you’ve raised your chances of guessing correctly within a smaller number of possible answers. There’s another technique you can add that will increase your guessing success rate even more.

Letter of the Day

If you make a random guess for each question you can’t answer—(A) for one and (D) for another and maybe (E) for this one—you’re doing very little to improve your odds. The solution? Pick one letter—any letter—and use it for every single guess. That’s the Letter of the Day approach.

Let’s say there are 10 questions you can’t answer. If you pick, for example, (B) as your Letter of the Day and answer (B) on every one of those 10 questions, what are the chances that (B) really is the correct answer to at least one of them, possibly more? Pretty good.

The Two-Pass System

With around 45 questions and 5 passages, you have roughly 1 minute and 20 seconds to answer each question, which is about 12 minutes for each passage and accompanying set of questions. The Two-Pass System will help you use that time most efficiently. Here are the steps to take:



Proven Techniques

Use POE, Letter of the Day, and the Two-Pass System to help boost your score.

The Two-Pass System

Pass 1: Answer the easy questions and guess at the hard ones, using the Letter of the Day.

Pass 2: Tackle as many of the hard ones as you can during the time left for that passage.

On your first pass through the questions:

- Answer all the easy questions first. If you can answer a question as you come to it, do so.
- Each time you come to a hard question that you can't answer, fill in a "guess" answer using your Letter of the Day and circle the question.

On your second pass through:

- Look at your watch to see how much time you have left for this passage. Go back to the hard questions you circled and tackle as many as you can before the time you allotted for that passage is over.

This system works well since all the questions are worth the same number of points, regardless of difficulty or the order in which you answer them.

Now let's examine a sample passage.