

AP Multiple-Choice: Deconstructing the Test

1. The multiple-choice section takes one hour and counts as 45% of the entire exam score. There will be five reading passages of varying lengths and 45 questions. The eight skill categories are assessed. The weighting for the categories varies somewhat but all are between 11-15%. See The *CED*, page 106 for more information.
2. Reading Passages—Prose passages are from different periods of modern English (the Sixteenth Century and after), essentially pre-1900 (often referred to as “dated text”) and post 1900.
3. Genres of nonfiction prose—Subgenres that may appear in passages include: autobiography, biography, diary and journal writing, history, journalism, letters, literary criticism, politics, science, social criticism.
4. Prose Diversity—The multiple-choice passages incorporate ethnic and gender diversity as well as national and chronological diversity. They are originally written in English and not from translations.
5. Level of Difficulty—Questions range from quite easy to medium to very difficult. They are not ordered from easiest to most difficult. Questions do, however, generally move chronologically through the passage from beginning to end. In general, the difficulty in AP MC often comes from the difficulty of the text itself, not from the type of question being asked.
6. According to David Jolliffe (“On Reading and Writing Analytically: Theory, Method, Crisis, Action Plan.” *AP English Language Reading and Writing Analytically*. College Board. 12), multiple-choice questions on most standardized tests are dominated by four types of questions that ask students to identify:
 - A central idea or gist of a passage
 - A meaning that can be attributed to a particular passage based on inferences
 - A “correct” answer about the content of a particular section of the passage
 - A grammatical error in an underlined portion of a sentence or how a sentence might be improved by some type of revision
7. AP Multiple-choice questions will include some of these same types of questions but will also include others. I have identified the majority of AP MC questions as
 - **Composition questions** – This new type of question asks students to “think like a writer.” They deal with a writer’s choices: they do not deal with grammar or correctness.
Examples:
 - In sentence 3, which of the following versions of the underlined text best established the writer’s position on the main argument of the passage?
 - Which of the following sentences, if placed before sentence 1 would both capture the audience’s interest and provide the most effective introductions to the topic of the paragraph?
 - In the fourth paragraph, the writer wants to provide further evidence to rebut the claim that converting to the metric system might be difficult. Which of the following pieces of evidence would best achieve this purpose?
 - **Comprehension questions** – What is this saying? Can you read and understand it? One specific, common subtype often asks a student to correctly read a **word in context**.

Examples:

- The author indicates that a writer’s ability to work with metaphor and imagery is less important than...
 - In the context of lines 43-48, “Self-consciousness” means...
 - In context, the phrase “sleepless vigilance” (line 27) suggests...
 - The misunderstanding discussed in lines 35-37 is that many who study Franklin...
- **Identifying the author’s purpose or intention** – this is sometimes couched as the effect on the reader or intended audience
 - Examples:**
 - The speaker’s primary purpose in the passage is to...
 - The rhetorical purpose of lines 14-17 (“And we...values”) is to...
 - The main purpose of the footnote is to...
 - The intended audience for this passage is most probably...
- **Identifying a rhetorical strategy, style feature, or method of development**
 - Examples:**
 - The stylistic feature most evident in lines 32-62 (“By these...may read”) is the use of...
 - The passage as a whole is best characterized as...
 - Lines 18-21 (“Some...sun”) rely primarily on...
- **Inference questions** – can you figure out what the author is saying or implying? This might be considered a special kind of comprehension question.
 - Examples:**
 - The series of phrases in lines 12-14 (“in muscles...became divine”) suggests...
 - It can be inferred from the passage that people ignore the “obvious truth” (line 36) for which of the following reasons?
 - It can be inferred that the “existence” mentioned in line 26 will be characterized primarily by...
- **Function questions** – how is an author using a rhetorical strategy or device; what is the author achieving with that use?
 - Examples:**
 - Which of the following best describes the function of the second sentence (lines 3-9) in the first paragraph?
 - The references in lines 20-26 (“It is...history”) serve to...
 - The speaker uses lines 30-40 (“I could not...largely excluded”) primarily to...
 - The final paragraph (lines 30-37) functions as...
- **Reference or antecedent questions** – what does this word, phrase, paragraph, idea or concept refer to?
 - Examples:**
 - “This power” (line 17) refers to...
 - In the last sentence of the footnote, the word “it” refers to...
 - The “arrow” in line 38 is a metaphorical reference to...
 - The antecedent of “it” (line 33) is...
- **Shift or transition questions** – can you see how the author transitions from one idea or block of text to another; can you identify when a shift in tone, style, or purpose occurs?
 - Example:**
 - The sentence that begins in line 41 (“For our own...”) marks a shift from...

- **EXCEPT questions** – a special form of identification question, this requires “the flip” from looking for what is there to what isn’t there, one the most difficult question types for students.

Examples:

- The citations from the rector of Hambleden’s letters do all of the following EXCEPT...
- The speaker draws on contrasts between all of the following EXCEPT...
- The speaker’s rhetorical strategies in the passage include all of the following EXCEPT...

- **Multiple/multiple-choice** – these time- consuming questions require careful reading and process of elimination. They seem to be becoming less frequent on the test.

Examples:

- Which of the following contribute(s) to the effect of the last three sentences of the passage (lines 69-73)
 - I.
 - II.
 - III.
 (A) I only
 (B) I and II only
 (C) I and III only
 (D) I, II, and III

8. Students should also note that questions will address different **amounts of text**. I refer to these by using commonly understood film terms:

- **“Close Shots”** –a word, phrase, or rhetorical device, it is a small amount of text
 - The word “education” (line 24) refers to...
 - In line 37, the phrase “as such boys do” functions primarily as...
 - Which of the following phrases could be best substituted for the phrase “he was” in line 40 to make the meaning more explicit?
 - The interjection “alas” (line 71) emphasizes the speaker’s...
- **“Medium Shots”** –a few sentences or paragraph(s), it is a medium amount of text
 - One purpose of the first paragraph is to...
 - Which of the following best describes the relationship between the first paragraph and the second paragraph?
 - The second paragraph is significant in that the speaker...
- **“Long Shots”** –the whole passage, most often asks about the main point, tone, effect, or purpose but also sometimes about the context or relationship of part(s) to the whole
 - In the passage, the author’s overall attitude toward Bentham can best be described as...
 - In relation to the rest of the passage, the first paragraph provides...
 - The primary imagery of the passage is that of...
 - The author’s main point in the passage?
 - This passage is most probably excerpted from...