

Mastering Essay Questions

- Reaching your goal: 3 essays in 135 minutes
- Two analytical essays: what AP readers look for
- Choosing and narrowing a topic
- Arranging ideas purposefully
- A writing style that works
- Polishing your essays for a top score
- Sample questions and student responses

Just as you don't learn to play the piano, twirl a baton, or dance hip-hop by reading books on music, baton-twirling, or dancing, you're not likely to become a better writer of essays by reading about essay writing. The best this book can do is to lay out some basic principles of essay writing for you to contemplate and incorporate into the writing you do every day. The more experience you have, the more control you'll have, and the better you'll perform not only on the AP exam, but also in future college courses and whatever work you do afterwards.

Our language contains many adjectives that describe good writing: *eloquent, well-written, lively, stylish, polished, descriptive, honed, vivid, engaging*, and countless others. On the AP exam you're instructed to write "well-organized" or "carefully reasoned" or "effective" essays—directions that mean, in effect, that your writing should be:

1. **Clear**, or easy to follow, because your ideas need to be clear to you before you can make them clear to others.
2. **Interesting**, or expressed in economical, entertaining language, because readers are put off by dull and lifeless prose.
3. **Correct**, because you and your work will inevitably be judged according to how well you demonstrate the conventions of writing.

If your ideas are expressed clearly, interestingly, and correctly, there is no reason that you can't expect to write three winning essays on the exam.

STEPS FOR WRITING THE PERFECT ESSAY

You won't have time to invent an essay-writing process during the exam. So, it pays to have a process in mind ahead of time, one that helps you to work rapidly and efficiently. Try to map out ahead of time the steps to take during each stage of the writing process. The plan that follows is a place to start. Use it while writing a few practice essays, but alter it in any way that helps you produce the best essays you can.

First Stage: PREWRITING

Prewriting consists of the planning that needs to be done before you actually start writing an essay:

- Reading and analyzing the question, or prompt
- Choosing a main idea, or thesis for your essay
- Gathering and arranging supporting ideas

Second Stage: COMPOSING

- Introducing the thesis
- Developing paragraphs
- Choosing the best words for expressing your ideas
- Structuring sentences for variety and coherence
- Writing a conclusion

Third Stage: EDITING and PROOFREADING

- Editing for clarity and coherence
- Editing to create interest
- Checking for standard usage and mechanical errors, including spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

How long does each stage last?

The truth is that the three stages overlap and blend. Writers compose, revise, and proofread simultaneously. They jot down sentences during pre-writing, and even late in the process may weave new ideas into their text. In fact, no stage really ends until the final period of the last sentence is put in place—or until the AP proctor calls “Time!”

No book can tell you how to divide up the 40 minutes recommended for each essay. What works for you may be different from what works for others. But most students get good results by devoting at least half the time—20 minutes—to composing and no more than 10 minutes each to prewriting and editing/proofreading.

TIP

Once you've developed a pattern that works, stick to it, and practice, practice, practice until it becomes second nature.

How to prepare

During the weeks before the exam, or even sooner, write an essay a day for several days in a row, until you get the feel of 40 minutes' writing time. Pace yourself and keep track of how much time you spend thinking about the topic, how many minutes you devote to composing the essay, and how long it takes you to proofread and edit.

To make every second count, don't waste time inventing titles for your essays (no titles are needed on the exam). Don't count words, and don't expect to re-copy your first drafts. Because AP readers understand that the essays are first drafts, feel free to cross out, insert words using carets (^), and move blocks of text with neatly drawn arrows. If necessary, number the sentences to make their sequence clear. You won't be penalized for sloppy looking essays. Just be sure they're legible.

TIP

Don't waste time inventing titles; you don't need them.

POINTERS FOR WRITING THE SYNTHESIS ESSAY

- Writing a synthesis essay
- Using sources to your advantage
- Developing a persuasive argument
- Pitfalls to avoid
- Integrating sources into your essay
- Sample question and student responses

The first essay question on the exam calls for a synthesis essay—an essay that argues your point of view on a given issue. Along with a prompt that describes the issue, you are given several sources related to the issue. One of the sources is an image, such as a photo, chart, graph, or cartoon. From at least three of the sources you are to draw facts, ideas, information—any relevant evidence you can use to bolster your argument.

To write the essay, you are allotted 55 minutes. The first 15 minutes are devoted to reading the sources. During this time, you may mark up the passages with your pen, take notes, write an outline, think about the issue, jot down a tentative thesis—in short, get ready to compose your essay. After the 15-minute prep period, you'll be permitted to open your test booklet and begin writing.

Because the prompt contains the topic for your essay, read it carefully with pen in hand to underline the words that tell you what you must do.

A Message From the Author

The next pages are full of pointers for writing the synthesis essay. But most of the guidelines also apply to writing the analytical essays required in response to essay questions 2 and 3 on the exam.

(Turn to page 135 for details on writing analytical essays.)

SAMPLE PROMPT FOR A SYNTHESIS ESSAY

Since the advent of cell phones, the Internet, e-mail and other wireless connections, we can stay in touch with the world 24/7 wherever we are, whatever we're doing. Does this ability to communicate make life more satisfying or does it lead to greater anxiety and stress?

After carefully reading the sources that follow, write an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support and takes a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the assertion that portable electronic communication has improved our lives.

The first paragraph of the prompt does little more than introduce the assignment. It may stir up your thinking, but it doesn't tell you how to proceed. It's the second

TIP

The prompt contains the topic for the synthesis essay. Read it carefully.

paragraph that actually spells out the instructions: *read the sources and write an essay*—not just any essay but one that *takes a position* that either agrees or disagrees with the proposition that portable electronic communication has improved our lives. It also offers you the option of *modifying* or *qualifying* the statement. That is, you needn't strongly defend nor strongly oppose the statement. You can take a position that falls somewhere in between.

What It's About

A synthesis essay is basically an **argumentative** essay. At the heart of the essay lies a claim, or statement of opinion. Call it a *main idea* or a *thesis statement*. The main idea spells out the overall purpose of the essay. Once you've made clear where you stand on the issue, the rest of the essay should back up your claim. To do that, you need to present a variety of supporting evidence.

The evidence you present is likely to make or break your argument. Solid evidence consists of facts, observations, statistics, the opinions of experts, relevant anecdotes, and more. But you'll get the most mileage from a series of logically presented ideas. No doubt you've had experience trying to convince someone to agree with you—to see an issue your way. Maybe you've tried to talk a teacher into raising a grade. Or how about the time you wanted to drive with your friends to a rap concert 200 miles away, and you had to persuade your parents to let you go? You probably cited reasons why you thought it was a good idea, gave examples of your maturity, reminded them of past instances when you acted responsibly, cited the fact that Scott's and Chris' parents have already given their consent, and so on. In short, you chose and shaped the most convincing evidence you could think of to fit the audience—your parents.

When you write the synthesis essay, you are faced with a similar task. Your audience, of course, will be AP essay readers, and your task is to convince them first, that you understand the essay assignment and second, that you can apply both your own ideas and other ideas you've found in the sources to build a persuasive argument.

Before you begin to write, however, you must read the sources.

Reading the Sources

Some students are blessed with lightning-quick minds that can instantly analyze an issue and articulate a thoughtful position on it. If you happen to be one of them, you're lightyears ahead of the pack. Enjoy your head start and plunge right into the sources to look for the evidence with which to build your case.

The rest of us, unless we happen to have thought about the issue in the past, will start from scratch. We'll begin reading sources with relatively open minds and will weigh all the evidence we can find before making up our minds.

The sources will offer a variety of interpretations and points of view for you to consider. Don't be satisfied that you know what any individual source is all about until you've analyzed it thoroughly and can say clearly what it contributes to the discussion of the issue. If you think it's okay to read only some of the sources in order to find enough ideas for your essay, please think again. In other words, read every source from start to finish before you start to write. After all, the most irresistible idea could pop up in the final paragraph of the last source.

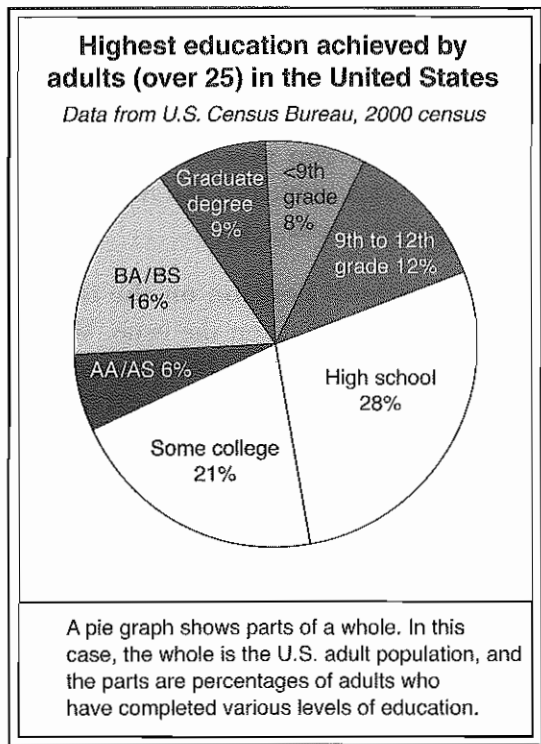
As you read the sources, keep in mind the following purposes:

- **Read to understand what the source has to say.** Quickly underline or circle striking ideas, topic sentences, and other key words and phrases. Use your pencil sparingly, though, or you may end up with most of each passage marked up. A note or two scribbled in the margin can serve later as shorthand reminders of what the passage says.
- **Read to analyze the author's position on the issue.** Read each source to determine where the author stands on the issue. Where the author presents evidence in favor of the claim, put a check in the margin. Where the evidence opposes it, write an X. Later, when you've decided on your own position, these notations will lead you quickly to ideas you may wish to include in your essay.
- **Read for evidence and data that help define your position on the issue.** The position to choose should be the one about which you have the most compelling things to say. The sources will offer a variety of perspectives. Read them in search of evidence that makes the most sense to you. The sooner you know where you stand, the better. If you've read the sources and still can't decide what position to take, make two lists, one for arguments in favor of the issue, one for those opposed. With any luck, the arguments on one side will speak to you more forcefully than those on the other.

You won't be penalized for taking an unpopular or politically incorrect stance, but you'll get little credit for promoting an unrealistic or illogical position. If you wish, you can straddle the fence on the issue with the "it-all-depends" argument. That approach is safe but not too exciting. But if your judgment tells you that the question warrants a middle-of-the-road response, don't hesitate to write one. In the end, readers will be less impressed by your position than by the potency of your presentation.

- **Interpret the visual source.** The visual source won't require much reading, but it still must be analyzed for what it communicates. Your job is to interpret the graph, the chart, the image, the cartoon, or whatever, and determine its relationship to the other sources. Ask yourself what relevant information it contributes to the discussion of the issue. Once you understand its point, you can use it as evidence in your essay.

Because visual sources often convey a large amount of information, they can be interpreted in various ways. It all depends on your perspective. Take, for example, the following pie graph that comes from the 2000 census:



Analyze what the graph tells you about the level of education of adults in the United States. In the spaces below, write three different conclusions that can be drawn from studying the graph:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

One of the more obvious things the graph shows is that the majority of American adults have finished high school. The graph also tells you that more than half the population has gone beyond high school but that more than one out of five students leave college before earning a degree. And so on.

If you were writing an essay on an issue related, say, to school dropouts, you might well focus on the two pieces of the graph that represent the 20 percent who failed to receive high school diplomas. One writer might conclude:

It's shocking that one-fifth of American adults never finished high school.

Another writer, taking another point of view, might say:

It's a tribute to America that eight out of ten adults have at least a high school education.

In other words, what you make of a visual source while writing your synthesis essay depends on the topic and your point of view on the issue.

Assessing the Validity of Sources

Because not all sources are equally reliable, it pays to think about their validity before tapping them for evidence to include in your essay. For each source, determine insofar as possible:

- When it was published
- Where it came from
- Who its readers were likely to be
- What its purpose was
- How objectively it was written

DATE OF PUBLICATION. The date of the piece is important because facts, ideas, what we know, how we think, what we do—almost everything—is perpetually changing. Consequently, information can become obsolete almost before we know it. A source written, say, in 1990 on a scientific subject, such as the exploration of space or human genetics, cannot be trusted to be up-to-date. The same holds true for discussions of the media, the economy, lifestyles, and many other topics. On the other hand, observations of the American system of government written in 1837 may be just as valid today as when they were written.

Some sources will seem more reliable than others. But always be cautious. Don't believe everything you read, and don't depend too heavily on any single source in your essay.

PLACE OF PUBLICATION. A passage that comes from, say, a blogger's Web site, a supermarket tabloid, or the pen of a politician with an axe to grind can't be completely trusted. On the other hand, a passage taken from a scholarly journal, a report published by a foundation, a government document, a popular mass magazine, or a book written by a reputable author is likely to be more reliable. But frankly, there are no guarantees.

THE INTENDED AUDIENCE. Authors almost always slant their writing to appeal to certain audiences. An article on children's health meant for a mass audience, for example, will be different from an article directed at subscribers to a pediatrics journal. Likewise, an author writing for an audience of nursing home residents will include certain material that would be inappropriate in a publication read mostly by college students. Knowing the intended audience, then, can help you weigh the validity of any source.

AUTHOR'S PURPOSE. An essay you write for school will be different from an email letter you write to a friend, mainly because the reason for writing is different. Every piece of writing has one or more purposes. Think of all the possibilities: to inform, to entertain, to anger, to provoke, to inspire, to move, to convince, to calm down, to compliment, to declare love, and on and on. Knowing why an author has written a particular passage helps you figure out how trustworthy it is.

TIP

A passage from a blogger's web site can't be completely trusted.

TONE AND LANGUAGE. Check the source for objectivity. If the author expresses a view in rational terms and supports the idea with sound evidence—even if you don’t agree with it—you can pretty well count on the reliability of the material. A source full of passion and inflammatory language, on the other hand, should not be accepted at face value.

For example, which of the following reports of a fire is a more reliable source of information?

#1: At 3:30 p.m. on September 21, the Bedford Fire Department received a call that a residence at 330 Holly Road was on fire. Ten minutes later, the first fire truck arrived at the site and found a conflagration on an unfinished porch. Firemen promptly extinguished the fire. Damage was limited to the wood frame of the unfinished structure. The cause of the fire is yet to be determined.

#2: Charlotte Robbins, a 36-year-old widow and mother of four young children wept profusely as she surveyed the charred ruins of the unfinished porch outside her Bedford home last weekend.

“Poor Fred, he would have been devastated,” she sobbed, referring to her husband, a disabled mechanic, dead only three weeks, whose dream had long been to build a porch for his loving family. “Why, oh, why did this happen to me?” Charlotte asked, but no one could answer. The cause of the fire remains a mystery, but the misery and heartbreak it caused for Fred’s survivors is readily apparent.

The contrast between these two passages is easy to detect. The first account states just the facts; the second gushes with emotion. Sources used for the synthesis essay won’t often be as extreme as these sample passages. But you can be sure that analyzing the tone and language of the sources will help you determine their validity.

How to Write a Synthesis Essay

Don’t be misled by the heading of this section. It promises more than it can deliver. The reason is that no one learns to master essay writing by reading about how to do it. You learn to write masterful essays by writing essays, by messing around with ideas and words, by experimenting, practicing, and doing. Many of the essays you’ve written in English, social studies, and other classes have probably been good practice for writing a synthesis essay. And if you’ve ever written a research paper containing a thesis you had to prove, you’ve already done it.

In a sense, this AP essay is a mini-research paper. You are given a topic and sources to study. You must devise a thesis and bring in evidence to support it. The AP guidelines require that in one way or other you refer to **at least three** of the sources. In addition, you may use your own knowledge, observations, and experience to support your point of view. In fact, you shouldn’t rely solely on the sources. An essay derived partly from your own thinking about the issue stands a greater chance for a top score because your own ideas add a layer of depth that would be absent from an essay drawn completely from the sources.

TIP

Use your own experience **and** the sources in your essay.

WRITING AN ARGUMENT

To write an argumentative essay, follow the same steps recommended for writing analytical essays: pre-writing, composing, editing, and proofreading—all discussed earlier in this book (see *Chapter 4, page 105*). But take note: The process may be similar, but argumentative essays also impose a unique set of demands, including:

- Introducing your position
- Supporting your position with appropriate evidence
- Refuting opposing viewpoints
- Avoiding faulty reasoning
- Incorporating sources
- Citing sources

INTRODUCING YOUR POSITION

Nothing weakens an argument more than an fuzzy, overly-complicated position statement. Therefore, make your position crystal clear with precise, unambiguous language. No rule says that a position statement is limited to a single sentence, although that's not a bad idea. A concise declarative sentence that focuses the reader on the issue may do the trick.

For example, let's assume that a synthesis essay topic deals with the effects of gambling. The issue is whether positive aspects of gambling outweigh its harmful effects, or whether the reverse is true—that gambling causes more harm than good. After weighing the evidence, a student claims:

Gambling is an activity that affects the lives of millions of Americans.

Well . . . the problems with that position statement nearly jump off the page. Just count its flaws:

- 1) It's too broad.
- 2) It fails to state a position or express the writer's opinion.
- 3) It's not arguable (no reasonable person would disagree with it).
- 4) It ignores the issue raised by the question.

In short, its weaknesses disqualify it as a viable position statement.

Now, look at another position statement on the same topic:

The economic effects of gambling are generally positive.

This position statement works. Why?

- 1) It's specific enough to be the topic of a short paper.
- 2) It expresses the writer's opinion.
- 3) Its controversial—worthy of an argument.
- 4) It addresses the issue raised by the question.

Use of Qualifying Words

Notice the word *generally* in the position statement, "The economic effects of gambling are generally positive."

Generally is a qualifying term that makes the statement less dogmatic. Without the word, the statement implies that gambling *always* has a positive effect on the economy, a claim that is hard to defend and nearly impossible to prove. Just a single exception would destroy its credibility. When you write a position statement, therefore, consider making the claim more difficult to challenge by including an appropriate qualifier, such as *almost, frequently, generally, in most cases, likely, often, might, maybe, probably, sometimes, customarily*, and so forth.

WHERE TO PUT YOUR POSITION STATEMENT

Ordinarily, an essay's thesis or main idea is stated early in the essay. How early? It can be the first sentence, or part of the first sentence, although creating a context for the thesis is often a desirable thing to do. That is, before stating your thesis, search through the sources for interesting ideas that you can adapt for an opening that will draw readers into your essay. Then, consider any of the following introductory techniques, or use one that you've invented.

1. Begin with a brief incident or anecdote related to the point you plan to make in your essay:

Until Harrah's introduced casino gambling, Joliet, an Illinois steel town 40 miles from Chicago, was a depressed place, with high unemployment, low wages, and slum conditions. With the coming of the casino, the city enjoyed a remarkable economic rebirth. Jobs were created, opportunities for businesses multiplied, and the place became a magnet for investment in new housing, businesses, restaurants, and motels. While gambling is known to harm millions of Americans, the revitalization of Joliet demonstrates that *its overall effect on a community can nevertheless be positive*. (Thesis statement in italics.)

2. State a provocative idea in an ordinary way or an ordinary idea worded in a provocative way:

Gambling casinos pay higher wages to their employees than almost any other businesses except salmon fisheries in Alaska. *In spite of its potential for positive economic effects, however, the gambling industry harms American society more than it helps*. (Thesis statement in italics.)

3. Use a quotation from the prompt, from one of the sources, or from your reading, your experience, your grandmother:

“All you need is a dollar and a dream.” These catchy words have enticed millions of gullible New Yorkers into throwing their money away with the hope that they’ll win the state lottery. *Because low-income people play the Lottery more often than well-off people, the lure of gambling harms them more than it does others.* (Thesis statement in italics.)

4. Knock down a commonly held assumption, or define a word in a startling new way:

Last February, when Sophie Whittaker, a waitress in St. Louis, Missouri, eagerly boarded a Mississippi River boat for an evening of playing slot machines, she had no idea that *winning* really meant *losing*. She won five hundred dollars that night and came back the next weekend to win some more. But the gambling gods had other ideas. Sophie lost, and lost big. To make up for losing nearly a thousand dollars, she returned a few nights later. Two days later she went back once more, and then again and again, sometimes calling in sick to her boss in order to spend the evening hoping for a jackpot. She won a few dollars now and then but slid ever deeper into debt, pulled down by her new-found addiction. Sophie’s experience is not unique. Hers is but one of countless similar stories about Americans who have *surrendered to the gambling habit, an unquestionable plague on American society.* (Thesis in italics.)

5. Ask an interesting question or two that you’ll answer in the essay:

Why have Native Americans fought so hard in Washington for the right to run casinos on their tribal lands? The answer is simple. Casinos make their owners rich. In addition, gambling profits can pay the bills for schools, hospitals, roads, and other needs. In effect, *in the right circumstances gambling does more good than harm.* (Thesis in italics.)

An introduction invites your readers into the essay. It enriches the essay and adds a layer of depth, suggesting that your essay hasn’t been written merely to fulfill the assignment, but that it has been prepared with care and thought.

But if none of these techniques for writing introductions works for you, or you don’t have the time to devise another, just state your position up front. Don’t phrase your position like an announcement, however, as in, “In this essay, I am going to prove that gambling does greater harm than good.” State your point, as in “Gambling does greater harm than good,” and go from there.

SUPPORTING YOUR POSITION WITH APPROPRIATE EVIDENCE

Each paragraph in your essay should contribute to the development of the main idea. It should contain facts, data, examples—reasons of all kinds to corroborate the thesis and to convince readers to agree with you. If you reread what you've written and find that the evidence fails to support the thesis, cross it out or revise it. Be ruthless! Even though you may admire your own words, give them the boot if they don't help to strengthen your case.

HOW MUCH EVIDENCE TO INCLUDE

A rule of thumb is that three distinct and relevant reasons will usually suffice to prove a point. Certainly three is better than one or two, but whether three is enough depends on the issue and the reasons that are cited.

It shouldn't be hard to support your main idea with three secondary ideas. Each of the three ideas may not demand an equal amount of emphasis, however. You might dispose of the weakest idea in just a few sentences, while the others require at least a paragraph or more. But whatever you emphasize, be sure that each idea is separate and distinct. Don't disappoint your readers with an idea that rehashes the first or second in different words. But regardless of the number of reasons, the argument will be weak if the reasons themselves are weak.

Here's an outline written by a student in support a thesis that said *the effects of gambling on the economy are generally positive*:

Reason 1: Gambling occurs in many places, including the Internet.

Reason 2: If you can't afford to lose money, you shouldn't gamble.

Reason 3: The money you lose goes into someone else's pocket.

The outline contains three reasons, but they are trite and largely irrelevant to the writer's position statement. Only Reason 3 vaguely refers to the economic consequences of gambling. On the whole, evidence of this caliber would fail to make a sufficient case.

In contrast, analyze these three reasons:

Reason 1: Gambling casinos create jobs, especially in rural areas.

Reason 2: Casinos increase property values in surrounding areas.

Reason 3: Casinos attract tourists who spend money for food, lodging, and services.

Using these three distinct and relevant reasons, a writer could construct a sturdy argument, especially if the reasons are sensibly arranged.

The outline recommended for analytical essays (*see page 135*) will help you sort through your reasons, pick the best ones, and put them in 1-2-3 order of importance. Then decide which reason provides the strongest evidence. That reason may be listed first in your outline, but save it for last in your essay. Giving it away too soon diminishes the impact of the second and third reasons. In other words, it will help you work toward your best point, not away from it. By no means is this the only way to structure an argument, but it's one that works.

TIP

Find at least three distinct ideas to support your thesis.

TIP

Save your best idea for last.

REFUTING OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS

Another decision you must make in writing a synthesis essay is whether to include a counterargument, or refutation—a paragraph or more that points out weaknesses in the evidence that may be used by someone who disagrees with your position. In order to write a counterargument, you must, of course, anticipate the arguments that a prospective opponent might use to support a point of view contrary to yours. Although it's not essential to present a counterargument, it's recommended, not only because it strengthens your position, but because a thoughtful counterargument adds punch to an essay that can't be achieved in any other way.

Let's return briefly to the issue of gambling and to the claim that the negative economic effects of gambling outweigh its positive effects. Here are three reasons that could be used to support that point of view:

- Reason 1: Gamblers squander money that has better uses, such as education, housing, family life, donations to charity, etc.
- Reason 2: Compulsive gambling is a disease that requires costly treatment to cure.
- Reason 3: Gambling drains community resources, such as the extra amount spent for law enforcement.

All the reasons sound valid enough, so how can they be refuted? Well, if you focus on Reason 3, you might begin by saying that it makes a good point, but it's not fool-proof. You could argue that casinos generate considerable tax revenue that pays for additional law enforcement, or point out that gambling facilities tend to increase the price of nearby housing, thereby raising the standard of living in a community. Since wealthier people usually pay higher taxes, the community should have no trouble paying for a larger police force. While refuting claims made by your opposition, it's important to resist the temptation of tearing every one of their arguments to shreds. Your essay will seem far more rational and circumspect if you concede the possibility that one or two of the reasons offered by the opposition are at least somewhat valid.

TIP

A counterargument adds punch to your argument.

WHERE TO PUT A COUNTERARGUMENT

There's no rule governing the location of counterarguments in an essay. Sometimes they belong near the end of an essay, just before the conclusion. At other times they fit better early in the essay. Counterarguments can also be discussed briefly in each paragraph. As you develop your case, anticipate opposing arguments and refute them then and there. In the end, the location of counterarguments is less important than the message they deliver: that your evidence is superior to that of the opposition.

AVOIDING FAULTY REASONING

Evidence must logically support your essay's main idea. To illustrate the point, let's consider a synthesis essay question on another issue—the issue of tracking, or ability grouping, a longtime controversy in high school education. Some educators argue that students make greater educational gains when they are grouped according to ability. Others claim that ability grouping does more harm than good.

To judge the quality of evidence, let's examine an argument that comes from an essay written in favor of ability grouping. The topic sentence of one of its paragraphs reads:

Intelligent and capable students are often bored in mixed classes.

What would you expect the writer of this statement to say next? From the following list, choose the sentence that provides the most logical and appropriate evidence in support of the topic sentence:

1. The quality of education improves when students are homogeneously grouped.
2. Bright students in mixed classes are often left waiting for slow students to catch up.
3. Pity the poor teachers tearing their hair out while trying to teach those godawful mixed classes.
4. No one with his head on straight supports mixed classes.
5. Homogeneous classes usually offer more intellectual stimulation.

All five sentences more or less relate to the subject of the essay. But not all of them offer a logical follow-up to the claim that mixed classes bore smart students.

1. In Sentence 1, the broad generalization for instance, raises issues far beyond the topic sentence.
2. Sentence 2 works well; it provides a relevant detail that supports the writer's view.
3. Sentence 3 is an emotional outburst that has no place in a rational discussion of the topic.
4. Sentence 4 contains inappropriate language that diverts the discussion away from the topic.
5. Sentence 5 provides a point that follows logically from the topic sentence.

Sentences 1, 3, and 4 illustrate three types of faulty reasoning that sometimes creep into essays: over-generalization, emotionalism, and distracting language. In your thinking and writing, try to avoid such pitfalls as well as these other types of faulty reasoning:

TIP

Beware of over-generalizations, emotionalism, and inappropriate language.

1. Irrelevant testimony:

New York Yankee shortstop Derek Jeter says, "I hated mixed classes in high school."

Is it logical to cite the classroom experience of a professional baseball player (or any other celebrity) in a serious educational argument?

2. Snob appeal:

The best AP English students everywhere agree that ability grouping is the way to go.

There's nothing logical about this statement. It is a crude appeal to readers who think they are or wish to be members of an elite group. It adds nothing to a discussion of the pros or cons of ability grouping.

3. Circular reasoning:

I favor ability grouping because it separates students with different skills and interests.

The fallacy here is that the writer has tried to justify a bias toward ability grouping simply by defining the term. Precisely why the writer prefers ability grouping remains unclear.

4. Absence of proof:

Grouping has been studied time and again, but I have never seen proof that mixed grouping is educationally superior to ability grouping.

A writer's admitted lack of knowledge can never be logically used as evidence to support a claim.

5. Oversimplification:

When you get right down to it, ability grouping is like life; people prefer to be with others like themselves.

It's neither logical nor helpful to reduce a controversial and complex issue to a simple platitude.

6. Telling only half the story:

Ability grouping is better because it serves the educational needs of both the smartest and the slowest students.

The writer has ignored the mass of students in the middle.

7. Going to extremes:

If ability grouping were abolished, the system of American education as we know it would no longer exist.

This sort of thinking suggests desperation. By offering only the most extreme position, the writer ignores all other possibilities.

INCORPORATING SOURCES

Instructions for the synthesis essay tell you to incorporate at least three sources into your essay. You may refer to more than three but you won't get any extra credit for doing so.

The simplest and most obvious way to use a source in your essay is to state your position and back it up with an idea pulled out of the source. Suppose, for example, that you are writing about the positive (or negative) effects of advertising on our lives, and you wish to make the point that it's virtually impossible to escape from the influence of ads.

One of the sources—call it *Source A*—discusses the growth of advertising in mid-20th century America. It contains this paragraph:

The most important, and most multidimensional, of the forces shaping youth culture was mass communications . . . Signs, billboards, store displays, supermarkets, the traditional media, and finally, the new, all-consuming, substitute environment, television, enveloped us in a cocoon of sensory information. I think it is doubtful that anyone who did *not* grow up in this postwar period can appreciate how much the senses of the young were bombarded, as they are today, by messages. Indeed, the media—in the broadest sense of the word—provided a new environment. To those who grew up in the new urban complexes, it virtually *was* the environment.

Ideas from this paragraph can be woven into an essay using any of the following techniques:

- Direct Quotes
- Indirect Quotes
- Paraphrasing
- Commentary

DIRECT QUOTES

Direct quotes are word-for-word reproductions of material found in a source. Everything—grammar, spelling, capitalization—must duplicate the original exactly, and the words must be enclosed in quotation marks:

Even though most people are unaware of how completely surrounded they have become by advertising, it has an unbelievably profound influence on the environment. In fact, *“To those who grew up in the new urban complexes, it virtually was the environment.”* (Source A).

If you wish to omit words from the original for grammatical or other reasons, use an ellipsis (. . .) consisting of three periods to mark the place where material has been deleted.

I think it is doubtful that anyone who did *not* grow up in this postwar period can appreciate how much the senses of the young were bombarded . . . by messages.

If you find it necessary to add words for clarity or any other reason, enclose the words in brackets [like this]. Brackets inform readers that the bracketed words are not part of the original quotation.

To those who grew up in the new urban complexes, it [advertising] virtually *was* the environment.

INDIRECT QUOTES

An indirect quote reports an idea without quoting it word-for-word. No quotation marks are needed.

Even though most people are unaware of how completely surrounded they have become by advertising, it has an unbelievably profound influence on the environment. In fact, Source A claims that *it virtually was the environment to those who grew up in urban areas during the postwar period.*

A Word of Caution

In your essay, use direct and indirect quotations sparingly and only as illustrative material. Use them to support ideas that you have first stated in your own words. Although you may be tempted to use lots of quoted material to make your case, don't do it. Don't let quotes dominate your essay. After all, the AP exam is a test of *your* writing ability, not of your ability to quote others.

Notice how the author of the following paragraph relied too heavily on quotations:

Even though most people are unaware of how completely surrounded they have become by advertising, it has a unbelievably profound influence on the environment. *"Signs, billboards, store displays, supermarkets, the traditional media, and finally, the new, all-consuming, substitute environment, television, [have] enveloped us in a cocoon of sensory information. . . ."* It is clear that *"anyone who did not grow up in this postwar period can appreciate how much the senses of the young were bombarded, as they are today, by messages. Indeed, the media—in the broadest sense of the word—provided a new environment."*

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is restating someone else's idea in your own words. A paraphrase contains the same information and should be roughly the same length as the original.

Even though most people are unaware of how completely surrounded they have become by advertising, it has an unbelievably profound influence on the environment. *In fact, the author of Source A says that advertisements actually became the environment in which young people in cities grew up after the war.*

COMMENTARY

The sources provided on the exam are meant to give you information and to stimulate your thinking about the issue. They also give you ideas to discuss in your essay. With a little practice, you can learn to pick material from a source, transfer it verbatim to your essay, adapt it, or shape it any way you want to build your main idea. But to write a more distinctive essay, one that reveals your ability to interpret and

analyze source material, try not only to draw from the sources but also to comment on them. Think of the sources as a one-sided conversation with the authors. Once the authors have their say, it's your turn to respond by commenting on their ideas, their reasoning, their points of view.

Thus, it would be perfectly appropriate to incorporate sources with such comments as:

"The author of Source B offers a short-sighted view of . . ."

"To a point I agree with the author of Source B, although he doesn't carry the argument far enough. To strengthen his case, he should have included . . ."

"In Source B, the author says that . . . , an assertion that supports my own views. I would add, however, that . . ."

"Clearly, the author of Source B has a bias against . . . , a failing that weakens her argument."

Notice that you need not comment only on sources with which you agree. Feel free to quarrel with authors whose ideas differ from yours. Show that they are all wet, out to lunch, or have loose screws—but please use more refined language than that. Avoid name-calling (*moron*, *airhead*, *ignoramus*, etc.) and exclamations such as, "That's the dumbest idea I've ever heard!" Refuting the opinions of others can bolster an argument, but treat even wrongheaded opinions with respect.

CITING SOURCES

In your essay, you must cite the source of all direct and indirect quotations. Custom also requires you to give credit to any source from which you borrow, paraphrase, or adapt ideas.

Don't bother to cite the source of everyday factual material that's known by most literate, reasonably alert people. No citation is needed, for example, if you draw from the sources the information that the United States is a republic, that Thanksgiving falls on the fourth Thursday in November, or that most kids like to stay up late at night.

Many different formats exist for citing sources, but on the AP exam you need no more than a brief parenthetical reference within the text of your essay, as in:

According to a school psychologist, "Some children may be better off if they escape their parents' grip, healthier if they grow up wild and free and sort things out on their own" (Source A).

Instead of writing *Source A* inside the parenthesis, you may insert the last name of the author, as in

One panel member summed up the conflict by saying, "Young people want a larger share in the decision-making about their lives" (Collins).

(Note that the end punctuation comes after the close of the parentheses and outside the quotation marks.)

Another technique for naming sources is to integrate the information more fully into the text, as in

Dean Marcy Denby argues that “the basic purpose of a university education has always been . . . etc.”

Which method you use to cite sources on the AP exam is up to you. It’s probably better to choose one method and stick to it. Using a variety can make you appear indecisive, maybe even confused.

The Problem of Plagiarism

The one basic rule about plagiarism is this: **Don’t do it!**

Why? For one thing, it’s dishonest, immoral, and it can get you into a whole mess of trouble. Intentional or not, plagiarism is theft. Stealing someone else’s words or ideas and passing them off as your own is, to put it bluntly, a stupid thing to do.

To avoid even the slightest hint of plagiarism on the AP exam, give credit to your sources. It’s simple: Whenever you take words or ideas from a source, identify their origin inside a pair of parentheses: (*Source B*), (*Jones*), or (*“Title”*). If you forget, your essay score will suffer. Even a brilliant essay that might otherwise earn an 8 or 9 may receive a score of 2 or 3 if you fail to document sources. When in doubt about the need to document a particular idea in your essay, play it safe and smart. Err on the side of inclusion, not exclusion.

Sample Synthesis Essay Question

What follows is a sample synthesis essay question. It is followed by the essays of three students. The essays were handwritten under AP testing conditions: 15 minutes to read the sources and 40 minutes to write the essay, with no access to a computer, a dictionary, or any other book. By reading the essays you’ll see what it takes to earn a high score. Read the comments, too. They’ll alert you to some pitfalls to avoid when you write a synthesis essay of your own.

Instructions: The following essay topic is accompanied by six sources.

Respond to the question below in a well-written, coherent essay that draws on ideas and information found in **at least three** of the sources. Don’t simply summarize or paraphrase the sources. Instead, **focus the essay on your point of view**, and use the sources to support or bolster your argument.

Topic: The right to privacy is a fundamental right in a free society. Yet, public figures—from politicians to athletes to entertainers—often have their private lives revealed by the media. Is this fair? Shouldn't celebrities enjoy as much privacy as ordinary citizens? Or should they expect to pay a price for fame by having details of their private lives made public? Is the public's right to know stronger than the right of celebrities to maintain their privacy?

Your task: Read the following sources carefully. Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources, take a position that supports, denies, or qualifies the claim that celebrities have the same right to privacy enjoyed by ordinary citizens.

In your essay, you may refer to the sources simply as Source A, Source B, etc., or by the authors listed below.

Source A (Hilden)

Source B (McElroy)

Source C (DeGrandpré)

Source D (Chart)

Source E (GNL)

Source F (Committee on Freedom of the Press)

SOURCE A

Hilden, Julie, *Does Celebrity Destroy Privacy?* published by FindLaw, an online legal news and commentary site for lawyers, businesses, students, and consumers.

The passage below is an excerpt from an article entitled “Is Disclosure of Private Facts About Celebrities Justified?” written in 2002 by Julie Hilden, an attorney and columnist.

Often, it is the intensely private aspects of a celebrity’s life—involving drugs, sex, or sexual orientation, marital discord, issues with children or other family members, or similar topics—that the public and the media deem newsworthy. (Illegality only ratchets up the stakes, and increases interest in the story.) But is the public entitled to know such private details about a celebrity, just because that person is a public figure?

Two basic theories are used to justify the exposure of celebrity privacy. One is the “waiver theory,” which holds that celebrities have given up their privacy by choosing to appear in the public eye. Those who believe in this theory see celebrities as having made a sort of Faustian bargain: lifelong fame in exchange for the lifelong loss of privacy.

Another widely cited argument for celebrities having forfeited their privacy is what I will call the “hypocrisy theory.” It holds that celebrities who, in their statements to the public, have lied about or deceptively omitted a private fact about themselves cannot then complain when the truth becomes known.

Neither of these theories is entirely valid, but the “waiver” theory is by far the weaker of the two. It seems somewhat unfair to say that because a person’s gift lies in acting, basketball, or singing, rather than, for example, engineering, architecture, or computer science, that he or she has somehow “chosen” to give up all of his or her privacy.

SOURCE B

McElroy, Wendy, "Clinton and Privacy," published by the Ludwig von Mises Institute, located online at www.mises.org.

The following passage is excerpted from an article written in September 1998 during the scandal involving President Bill Clinton and a young White House intern, Monica Lewinsky.

In his four-minute address to the nation that followed his grand jury testimony of August 17th, President Clinton repeatedly made a specious claim: namely, that he has a right to privacy concerning his sexually inappropriate relationship with former White House intern Monica S. Lewinsky. "[I]t is private," he declared. "Now this matter is between me, the two people I love most, my wife and our daughter, and our God...It is nobody's business but ours."

. . . Yet the truth is: President Clinton has no right to privacy—politically, morally, or legally—on the Lewinsky matter. There are at least two political reasons why Clinton has no claim to privacy regarding Lewinsky. First, he has vigorously pursued a policy of using the images of his personal life when they are to his political advantage. From throwing frisbees to his puppy Buddy to dancing on the beach with Hillary in what was widely regarded as a staged display, Clinton has used the media to "leak" his personal life to the American public. Or, rather, he has leaked those images that present him as a man of the people, as a loving husband and father, as just folks.

Having shrewdly used his personal life to further his political career, Clinton cannot object when others question whether the carefully scripted images are accurate.

SOURCE C

DeGrandpré, Vincent M., "Understanding the Market for Celebrity: An Economic Analysis of the Right of Publicity," published online by Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett, LLP, September 15, 2001.

The following passage is an excerpt from a monograph prepared by a New York law firm.

. . . But what explains the public's interest in celebrities? Several theories have been formulated to explain this phenomenon, of which we can retain a few promising ones. In his provocative work *Life: The Movie*, Neal Gabler argues that entertainment, and the movies in particular, have become so important to our individual existence that American public life itself has evolved to resemble the movies. Gabler argues that this trend has reshaped every sphere of human activity from politics to religion to the arts, all because of the need for these activities to rival readily available entertainment in keeping public attention. Not only have moving pictures become the central metaphor for understanding American public life, they have changed our epistemology, the very understanding of the world in which we live. According to Gabler, we now live in the "lifies." This "lifies" metaphor not only captures the reality that Americans use a significant portion of their income to be entertained; it conveys the idea that we have populated our lives with celebrities, those lead actors whose stories we eagerly watch and weave into our lives.

Our urge to know and associate with celebrities is not only motivated by our desire to be entertained, however. As one author notes, "celebrities have become, in recent decades, the chief agents of moral change in the United States." They have come to embody abstract issues of points of view, and are shorthand forms for ideals or expertise. Theorists have also argued that celebrities attract us because we see them as individuals who stand out in our anonymous, mass society. We seek them because they make us feel in-the-know or on the inside; in our mass society, they humanize our lives. "Stars" attract us because they seem to be free, on-the-go and liberated from the constraints of daily life.

Not surprisingly, Gabler, like others, has argued that the identity of modern Americans is shaped not only by their intimate relationships, but also by their only-superficially intimate ones with well-known personalities. As Kenneth Gergen writes,

"[W]e may know more about Merv, Oprah, Johnny, and Phil than we do our neighbors. It is undoubtedly true that for many people film relationships provide the most emotionally wrenching experience of the average week. The ultimate question is not whether media relationships approximate the normal in their significance, but whether normal relationships can match the power of artifice.

As a result, celebrities have become a sort of "social glue," allowing people from different points of society to converse, to share feelings and essentially to carry on informal relations. In this view, then, the demand for celebrity images and information is driven in large part by society's communication needs and by our respective need to forge personal identity.

SOURCE D

Adapted from “Average Circulation for Top 100 ABC Magazines,” Magazine Publishers of America © 2006 Magazine Publishers of America

The table below shows the average circulation of several magazines, listed according to their ranking among the 100 most popular publications.

Rank	Title	Average Circulation Per Issue
1	AARP Magazine	22,675,655
3	Reader's Digest	10,111,773
12	People*	3,734,027
17	Playboy	3,060,376
32	US News & World Report	2,028,167
53	Teen People*	1,525,409
59	STAR*	1,428,767
74	National Enquirer*	1,239,967
87	New Yorker	1,053,019
91	Business Week	986,549
100	Forbes	926,581

*Publications focusing on celebrities

“STAR serves the dish that feeds our insatiable appetite for celebrity news, delivering the makeups, the breakups, the extraordinary and ordinary moments in the lives of the people we most want to watch.”

—STAR MediaKit 2006

SOURCE E

GNL, "For Today's Public Figures, Private Lives Really Matter," *Buzzle.com*, *Intelligent Life on the Web*, November 30, 2004.

The passage below is adapted from an article published in an online British periodical, of general interest to contemporary readers.

Ask yourself this question: do you really—and I mean really—believe that modern politicians are entitled to a private life?

The claim to privacy sounds so reasonable and so right, and at first sight indeed it is. Most of us are not politicians or public figures of any kind, but we all have a clear notion of the difference between our own public lives—where we are answerable to all—and our private ones—where we are answerable only to ourselves and to those closest to us. How much more necessary, we reason, must it be for public figures, exposed to so much more scrutiny, to maintain that distinction?

Why should partners and children have to be in the public eye, we wonder, our decent instincts once again to the fore. Why should the public be entitled to know where the famous go on holiday, or go to dinner, or what they spend their money on? And why, some even assert, do we have any right to know about their private mistakes and their sexual secrets? Nobody denies that such things are often interesting, but surely that is not the point. Would we not all be happier people living in a better society if we drew the line?

. . . [T]he awkward truth is that the way people live their private lives does tell us things that can help to make judgments about them as public people. Their sex lives may be less indicative here than less conveniently dramatic things like how they get on with their children or what they do with their spare time. I'm not sure which is more illuminating: the fact that Tony Blair likes going on holiday in Tuscany or the fact that Gordon Brown doesn't. But each tells me something that I'm glad to know.

SOURCE F

“Invasion of Privacy,” *First Amendment Handbook*, The Reporter’s Committee for Freedom of the Press, Arlington, Virginia, 1992.

The passage below appears in a handbook about freedom of the press written for professional journalists.

The concept of a right to privacy was first articulated in an 1890 Harvard Law Review article by Louis Brandeis and Samuel Warren. It took American courts 15 more years to recognize it. The Georgia Supreme Court was the first to do so in *Pasevich v. New England Life Insurance Co.*, a case involving the use of an individual’s photograph without his permission in a newspaper advertisement.

Today, almost every state recognizes some right of privacy, either in statutory or common law. Most state laws attempt to strike a balance between the individual’s right to privacy and the public interest in freedom of the press.

. . . Public figures also have a limited claim to a right of privacy. Past and present government officials, political candidates, entertainers, and sports figures are generally considered to be public figures. They are said to have voluntarily exposed themselves to scrutiny and to have waived their right of privacy, at least in matters that might have an impact on their ability to perform their public duties.

Although private individuals can usually claim the right to be left alone, that right is not absolute. For example, if a person who is normally not considered a public figure is thrust into the spotlight because of her participation in a newsworthy event, her claims of a right to privacy may be limited.

Sample Student Responses

Whitney's Response

(Typed as it was written)

In dentists waiting rooms and magazine racks all across the United States is People Magazine, one of the most popular magazines in America. The public likes to read about famous people. They are curious about who is going out with who and who is getting divorced or having children. They enjoy photos of movie stars going shopping at the Safeway or visiting Disney World or just walking down the street or washing dishes. That helps them identify with the stars who do the everyday activities of life. It makes them think that being famous is not that big of a deal because even celebrities have to take out the garbage once in a while. In addition when we think of celebrities as just plain folks like us, we "feel in-the-know or on the inside." (Source C) In a way, imagining that we really "know" famous people, the writer of Source C says, in our mass society, celebrities "humanize our lives" by making us feel important.

A problem takes place when the famous person wants to maintain privacy. He or she has the right to do that but the public also has the right to try to find out as much as they want about celebrities. If a famous person wants privacy, they have to take steps to get it. As an example, J.D. Salinger the author of Cather in the Rye. For many years he has escaped in the mountains of Vermont since he wants no part of a public life. He gives no interviews and refuses to show his face in public.

However, Salinger is an exception. Lots of famous people say they want privacy but their actions are not in that direction. As an example, Bill Clinton, former President of the US told the country in August, 1998, that his relation with Monica, his intern, was none of our business. However, as president, everything he does and says is our business. He was elected to his office by the people, and the people have a right to know everything about him. McElroy (Source B) describes some of the images that Clinton chose to make public, such as playing with his puppy on the beach. What McElroy says is true, that Clinton didn't have the right to choose which parts of his personal life would be "leaked" to the public and which aspects were out of bounds. GNL, the author of Source E seemed to agree when he wrote "The way people live their privat lives does tell us things that can help to make judgments about them as public people."

It's not as important to know facts about famous athletes and movie stars, but many of them willingly let themselves be photographed and probably encourage reporters to write stories about them. They even hire publicists to attract attention to themselves. Many people would die for a chance to have their names and faces in the paper. Some people even do heinous things in search of their fifteen minutes of fame. They go on a shooting rampage like the boys at Columbine HS, or could assassinate a famous figure, like the killer of John Lenon. On a less extreme scale they could put themselves through degrading and humiliating experiences on reality television, all for the chance to be noticed or considered out of the

ordinary. Some people say that the desire to be different or nonconforming is part of human nature. However, once they make a name for themselves, they often find that fame is not all that great after all.

Once a person has made an effort to become famous, they have given up their rights of privacy. This so-called “waiver theory (Source A) makes sense. It says that the choice that celebrities make to become public figures, they trade privacy for fame. Since nobody forces them to make this “Faustian bargain” (Source A), they have to accept that the eye of the people will be on them all the time and they have no right to complain.

Your impressions: _____

Comment to Whitney from an AP Reader

You engage your reader immediately by showing that the issue of your essay is current and widespread. By explaining both the desire and the rewards of knowing about famous people, you provide a context for your thesis statement at the beginning of the second paragraph. To support your point of view, you cite examples not only from the sources but from your own fund of knowledge, and set up a particularly apt contrast between the behavior of J.D. Salinger and Bill Clinton. In various ways throughout your essay, you emphasize the public’s psychological need to know about the lives of famous figures. That emphasis leaves unaddressed the issue of the public’s right to know, although you imply that a *need* to know is tantamount to the *right* to know.

Let me commend you for making the most of your references. You cite the source of the ideas, of course, but also enter into a kind of dialogue with some of the authors. You remark, for example that what “McElroy says is true,” and that the “waiver theory” found in Source A “makes sense.” This technique astutely integrates the sources into the text of your essay and helps the authors of the sources effectively participate in the development of your main point.

Another strength of your essay is that it discusses issues surrounding the pursuit of fame, including some people’s extraordinary efforts to achieve it. The examples you choose are quite startling and lead seamlessly and convincingly to your conclusion that those who have sought fame have no right to complain when their privacy is violated.

Overall, the essay demonstrates your maturity as a thinker. The writing, however, is another story. It contains some sentence errors and a few awkward uses of language. Also, the point of the paragraph about people’s craving for fame seems to wander from the essay’s main idea. These flaws are relatively minor but they keep the essay from earning the highest possible score. Score: 8

Sonya's Response

(Typed as it was written)

The right to privacy is important. If you know that everything you do is being watched, you can't be free to do what you like. It is like you are a prisoner which is not right in a free country like ours. This affects especially famous people because they are the ones most watched and put under a microscope by photographers, fans, and reporters.

Source A says, "It seems unfair to say that because a person's gift lies in acting, basketball, or singing, rather than, for example, engineering, architecture, or computer science, that he or she has somehow "chosen" to give up all of his or her privacy." I believe that a person should be free. A person who is a celebrity is entitled to the same freedom as everyone else. Just because a person is a fashion model or a baseball player doesn't mean they should not have the freedom to do what they choose to do.

Source C says that "Stars attract us because they seem to be free, on-the-go and liberated from the constraints of daily life." That statement is not true for many stars. They can't go out without being surrounded by crowds of people. Just to go out of the house requires a plan to trick the photographers and the people who write gossip columns. Just to go to the store for a loaf of bread means avoiding cameras and microphones waiting outside. This is not being free. It's more like an animal trapped inside in a cage in my opinion.

If you read the chart in Source D, it reveals that celebrity magazines sell several millions of copies. To fill up the pages of People and STAR magazine, which are just two examples, many reporters and photographers are hired to watch celebrities. They are basically professional stalkers. An ordinary person can keep their lives private if they want to. Movie stars and other celebrities don't have that right, and that's wrong. In our country everybody is supposed to be equal. I wouldn't go so far as to say that famous people are not equal, but with little right to privacy, equality is much harder to achieve for them.

In conclusion, it is easy for someone to look up to a famous person with envy of their money, looks, house, car, and their lifestyle. But the next time you are tempted to do that, imagine that you are walking in their shoes and you will see that privacy is too valuable to give up.

Your impressions: _____

Comment to Sonya from an AP Reader

By stating your thesis early and often, you leave no doubt about where you stand on the issue of privacy for celebrities. Your essay's unity, therefore, is one of its obvious strengths, and perhaps a weakness, too. Each paragraph restates the notion that lack of privacy leads to lack of freedom, unquestionably a thoughtful idea. But by limiting yourself to that single notion, you oversimplify the whole right-to-privacy issue and miss a chance to discuss it in depth.

The sources you cite are closely linked to your thesis, but they shape your argument. By leaning on them too heavily, you have abandoned control of the discussion. It would have been preferable to state your positions and then integrate source material as supporting evidence instead of relying on sources for the topic and the starting point of each paragraph.

Your essay follows the popular five-paragraph structure. For that you cannot be faulted, although it turns what could be a fresh and scintillating essay into something more conventional. As it should, the final paragraph brings closure to the essay, but at the same time it raises a new issue—that privacy is too precious to give up for the trappings of celebrity. This is an observation worth pondering, but is only tangentially related to your essay's main concern, the right to privacy. Score: 5.

Ricky's Response

(Typed as it was written)

People like Michael Jackson, Tom Cruise and Jennifer Anniston are celebrities always on TV and in the newspaper. But who cares about their drug habit, sex life, marriage problems, issues with children or other family members, or similar topics? I know I don't. If I asked my friends they would not care either.

When Clinton was president he had a affair with Monica Levinsky. He said I did not have sex with that woman. Some people believed it and some people called Clinton a liar. I did not matter whether he was or not. He declared "Now this matter is between me, the two people I love most, my wife and our daughter and our God. It is nobody's business but ours."

Since the president's sex life is nobody's business, Brad Pitt's romance with — (forget her name) Jolie is also noone else's business and Brad Pitt is less important than the president. If the people cared about Clinton's sex life they did not have to vote for him, even though he was elected two times.

The question I ask is what explains the public's interest celebrities? The author Neal Galber says that movies are so important that our lives resemble movies, so naturally we are interested in celebrities. We see them as outstanding individuals and so we want to know how they got that way. One author said, they humanize our lives, which means they make us more human. Even so their privacy is not our business so we should stay away from them. When they want to become more popular, some do outrageous things and want their photographs in the paper. Sometimes they put their home addresses on the web. Most of

the time they are just regular people trying to get along, so we should leave them alone.

Your impressions: _____

Comment to Ricky from an AP Reader

Your essay deserves a low score mainly because it lacks unity and fails to synthesize any of the sources. To be sure, you clearly make the point the private lives of celebrities don't matter to you. Yet, you explain that we are curious about celebrities because they are outstanding in some way. At the end you contradict yourself again by declaring that celebrities are "just regular people." Despite the overall incoherence of these and other ideas, the essay contains occasional insights—your discussion of Neal Gabler's theory, for example. But they remain under-developed and get lost in the confusion.

Your failure to synthesize sources is a particular shortcoming. Synthesis requires documentation of the sources cited. Although some of your ideas are drawn from the sources, you give them no credit. Using others' ideas without acknowledgment is unacceptable in an AP essay. Score: 2

POINTERS FOR WRITING ANALYTICAL ESSAYS

- Writing an analytical essay
- Picking "rhetorical strategies" to write about
- Reading the passage with eyes wide open
- Arranging ideas pragmatically
- Using a down-to-earth writing style
- The nuts and bolts of polishing an essay
- Sample questions and student responses

One, or sometimes two, of the three essays on the exam are analytical. That is, you must read passages and **analyze** them. (A question sometimes contains two short passages to be analyzed and compared.) To start you off in the right direction, you're often given the author, date, and context of the passage.

The prompt usually instructs you to write about the author's use of "rhetorical strategies." In other words, you are expected to analyze how the passage conveys its meaning, achieves its purpose, or creates an effect. Your job is to dissect the passage by breaking it down into its component parts in order to explain how the author put it together.

On some exams in the recent past, students were assigned two such essays. On other exams, the last essay was different. Instead of analyzing the rhetoric of a passage, students analyzed the validity of an idea contained in a short statement or paragraph.

HIGHLIGHT

Most analytical essays examine the purpose, content, structure, and rhetoric of a passage.