

General Description:

Welcome! I'm glad you opted to take AP English 12. I hope that together, we can make the class a great one! In this course, we'll have many goals. First, AP12 is, according to the College Board®, an intensive, literature-based Language Arts class, built on careful reading and critical analysis, one that approximates an introductory college course. Second, the course aims to be the capstone to your four-year high school English education. A third component is the actual AP English Test in May, on which a score of three or better might earn college credit. Finally, AP English strives to build on and extend your pre-existing love for literature and language. It should be a great time!

What might you want to know about me? Well, I've taught this class several times before, but not last year. I've also taught the 11th-grade AP English class previously. I've been teaching high school English forever. I live in SE Portland, love to ride bicycles, have two sons, and my wife teaches senior English at Wilsonville HS. If you have friends over there, they might have "Ms. West" for English. In our free time, we always talk about lesson plans and student learning and how to maximize the efficacy of feedback on student essays. Good times.

The curriculum for this class is based on reading and writing about literature. The College Board® says "AP students should have the maturity, the skill and the will to seek larger meaning" in the imaginative literature we explore. In developing your reading skills, we will practice making observations about both content (theme, idea, character, for example) and technique (motif, setting, irony, for example) and then seek to unify the two categories: the author does these strategic things in order to develop and convey this idea. We will also write a great deal. That writing will be first and foremost *for* you. I ask that in this class, you don't write *for* me, or that you don't write *for* a grade, or even that you don't write *for* a test. Instead, I ask that you write *for* yourself—because you value writing and because you want to become a better writer. I ask you to take *ownership* of your writing and, ultimately, of your learning. In other words, ask not what this course can do for you, but rather what you can do for yourself, through this course. (That, btw, is called an allusion. And bombast. And irony. But not really.)

Major 'strands' of the course:

- the core of the class is a genre-based study of literature, including:
 - major works: novels, short fiction, poetry, and drama
 - historical contexts
 - a substantial focus on twentieth century works
- the writing program is flexible and strives to personalize instruction and practice:
 - you can expect increased choice in tailoring assignments to your individual needs, but with that freedom comes the need for increased responsibility
 - the central goal of the writing program is to develop objective self awareness as a writer, so that one may then *write with intention*
 - a secondary goal is to develop the ability to write under *time limits*
 - please think of the teacher as less of an *authority* and more of a *resource*

Student Requirements:

- the work(s) we are studying: Please always have the book we are studying with you during class. I will give you a “weekly schedule” on Mondays. If you’re involved in other time-consuming activities, this helps you plan accordingly. Also, you may want to consider purchasing your own copies of the texts we’ll read, chiefly so that you can write in them while reading. If you don’t though, school copies will be available.
- a journal for regular use in class
- a writing portfolio to store work from your writing process (I will provide and store these. If you started one last year, consider continuing the same one this year.)
- a binder or part of a binder with some system for organizing at least the following:
 - Notes
 - Literary Terms (glossary) section
 - handouts
 - tests, quizzes, etc
- good faith in completing assignments and meeting deadlines; I ask that you start from a ‘how can I get something out of this?’ approach and not from a ‘how is this gonna give me something?’ approach. ‘How do I get the most points outta this with the least amount of work?’ is unacceptable.

Grading Policies:

Underlying Grading Principles:

1. grades are a means and not simply an end
2. students should and will be able to **earn** whatever grade they desire

Points: Grades will be calculated on a straight points system, with individual point totals based on the importance of the assignment. Not all assignments receive points. We’ll tend toward several large assignments worth more points rather than many smaller assignments worth fewer.

Letters converted to points: Letter grades on essays will usually be converted to points as follows:

A = 98 A- = 92 B+ = 88 B = 85 B- = 82 C+ = 78 C = 75 C- = 72

Revision and Rewrites:

- a. Students will be required to make substantive revision to one major paper each semester. Explicit revision strategies will be addressed in class. Additional revision is encouraged, especially when it may help meet an individual writing goal. Revisions must be accompanied by the original. I will re-grade the revision.
- b. Rewrites (less substantial change than a revision) may be completed at your discretion. Rewrites must be accompanied by the original. I will quickly reread the revision, but not offer feedback. You can increase an assignment’s grade by one letter grade, but this is not guaranteed.

Late Policy: I will dock 10% of the earned credit for each school day that the assignment is late. After 5 days, the most you can earn is 50% credit of, again, the earned grade (so, 50% of a B = 42.5%). For an excused absence: you have two school days to make up any missed work. Thereafter, the unexcused late policy above applies. All school days count, regardless if you have our class that day.

Due Dates, Schedules, and Mental Health:

Students in AP English are often stressed-out high achievers. You take other advanced classes, play an instrument, play sports, stress about college, have relationships, are in Honor Society, and try to stay engaged with your family. Rarely is there enough time to do it all. Everybody gets ‘pinched’ and overwhelmed from time to time. For some, an emotional or mental health crisis can occur. I would rather extend a due date for a paper or allow a quiz alternate when you didn’t complete the reading. In other words, I’m flexible. We can work something out when things go south.

With that said, I add these two caveats: 1. that you try, as much as possible, to proceed *proactively*, *before* you find yourself in a hole, and 2. that you *take the initiative* (instead of waiting for me or your counselor or your parent to *own* your learning for you) and that *you* propose a replacement instead of asking what replacement I have ready for you. I don’t have one—you should.

And lastly, because of the nature of the system and grades and my flexibility, I must ask that you not take advantage of my willingness here. That could be by repeatedly asking for extensions, or prioritizing other classes before AP English because Mr. West will understand but Ms. X won’t, or trying to turn in missing work weeks later (especially at the end of the semester!), after it has lost its context and / or your friends in class have theirs back so you can just copy. I’m sorry that this section has to be so long. These scenarios are based on past experiences.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else’s words, ideas, or intellectual work, either directly or indirectly, in their words or in your own words, without the full acknowledgement that it came from somewhere else. Plagiarism is unethical, anti-social, anti-intellectual, and earns bad academic karma. If you do it, it’s gonna get you. Avoid it. When in doubt, cite! Don’t be the embarrassed plagiarizer, in a terrible situation when I catch it. The penalty for plagiarism is a zero for the assignment, with no opportunity for make-up.

Participation:

The best class is one in which many different voices are heard, with new and original comments. The best discussions are progressive and not regressive, not peppered with comments like, ‘I want to go back to what so and so said five minutes ago...’ Please be willing to speak up, even if you secretly believe you’re not as smart as so-and-so. (You are—just maybe in a different way—or maybe in the same way—you just don’t know it yet.) Some students dominate discussions. That’s sometimes okay. They have lots of good things to say. Others should speak up more often too though. Be confident! Also, as an addendum, know that participation won’t be graded directly, but will be an important factor in determining grade “bumping” (‘Can my 89.3% be an A?’) *and* my willingness to be even more flexible with due dates, etc. as outlined above.

The Mailbox:

Please notice that there is a silver mailbox in the classroom, over by the door. Is there a letter in it? Let’s go see...

Course Policies, Procedures, and Behavior Expectations:

- Please respect yourself, your classmates, our room, the curriculum, and me.
- Phones: are a distraction. Even if just on your desk or in your lap, your phone commands your attention and disengages you. Please turn it off and put it away. Phone use in and around class is inversely proportional with learning. Plus, it's rude. Here's part of the official WLWV School Board District Policy:

Personal electronic devices shall be turned off during instructional or class time, during passing times between classes or at any other time where such use of the device would cause a disruption of school activities. Devices which have the capability to take photographs or record video or audio shall not be used for such purposes while on district property or while a student is engaged in district-sponsored activities, unless as expressly authorized in advance by the principal or designee. Computers, tablets, iPads or similar devices brought to school will be restricted to academic activities and independent communications.

Pretty clear, I'd say.

- Please don't share information about an assignment, quiz, or test that *you've* completed or taken and that *other people* have not, either through talk or device, etc. That's not fair. I consider it cheating.
- Please don't use the internet for ideas of what to write about or as an aide in reading a text: using the internet for ideas of what to write about or as an aide in reading a text is flirting with plagiarism and actually prevents you from ever learning how to come up with ideas on your own. Yeah, sure, some web site might have a "better" idea about the writer's use of irony, or about the writer's development of motif patterns, but when you use a web site instead of ever figuring these things out on your own, you never practice developing your own ideas—you never *improve*. In other words, you never *learn*. You become a repeater, not a free, independent, critical thinker. It's the opposite of learning. Unless you're doing research, which is a different scenario...
- Grades online: My grades online are usually pretty up-to-date. Occasionally, especially near grading periods, I get buried with lots of grading and my turn-around time is longer. Also, I grade papers in the order in which I receive them. If yours is late for some reason, even an ok'd reason, I'll just put it on the bottom of the pile.
- Please don't plagiarize, and please don't talk about a quiz or test to someone who hasn't taken it yet.
- Extra handouts are stored in the labeled drawer in the corner. If it's empty, check online.

The Writing Program: Premises and Procedures

I believe that...

- Writing is a process, involving several different and distinct intellectual procedures...
- Students benefit when they practice those individual procedures individually
- Productive idea generation is central to successful finished writing pieces
- Students benefit when they relax and calm down about their writing, that is, when they accept that nothing that they writing in high school English class has to be 'perfect'
- Students benefit when the teacher calms down, relaxes, and doesn't try to identify every single way that he thinks a student could improve their essay. Students often get discouraged in this way. A couple areas to focus on is usually best.
- Run-on sentences, incomplete sentence fragments, inadequate paragraphing and improper pronoun use are all bad and should be minimized.
- We will write:
 - informal reaction pieces
 - explanatory, analysis, and / or interpretation pieces
 - evaluation pieces
 - pieces that feature research (secondary sources) in a substantial way
 - timed pieces
- Not all student writing will be nor needs be read by the teacher to be useful or worthwhile. In other words, the student comment, "I worked so hard on this and he didn't even read it" is beside the point: the *teacher* is not the reason for practicing writing
- Students are allowed to ask that the teacher reconsider the grade on a piece of graded writing
- College-credit earning scores on the AP Exam require a specific type of writing. We'll practice it.
- The more you practice writing, on your own, for yourself, the better you will become.
- The more you practice APE-exam writing, on your own, the better you will do on the AP exam. If the AP exam is important to you, you can work extra hard to prepare for it. I can assist with that. But if the exam is important to you, don't just sit back and wait for me to 'teach' it—take the initiative and ask me for some extra prep for it.
- In general, I personally value clarity as the single greatest trait of good analytic writing. That usually means writing plainly, and directly, and avoiding super-fancy words. Just so you know.

Based on these beliefs, then...

- We will start by self-assessing ourselves as writers
- Students will set individual writing goals, develop plans to address them, and reflect on progress made toward them
- We will (again) have in-classroom portfolios, containing writing, reflections, feedback, drafts, and notes

Major Texts used in the course: I will provide each student with each of these texts, but students sometimes like to get their own copies of some texts so that they can write in them while reading.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

The English Patient by Michael Ondaatje

Sula by Toni Morrison

"Macbeth" by William Shakespeare