



AP English Language Webinar: Synthesis

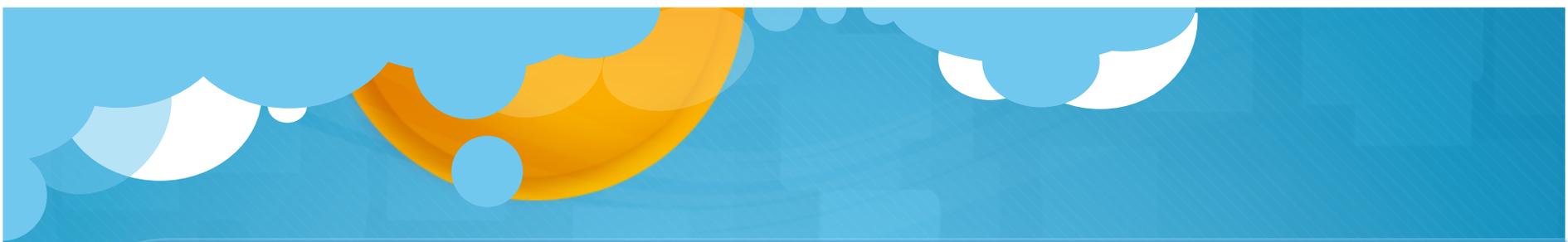
June 21, 2016 – Happy summer!



Cara Cassell

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- ◊ 25 years at Decatur High School
- ◊ 18-ish years teaching AP Lang/Comp
 - ◊ On the 4x4 block
 - ◊ On the A/B block (at the same time as the 4x4)
 - ◊ Currently: one block day, 3 50-minute days per week
- ◊ 11-ish years Reading the AP exams



What you GIVE as an AP Reader:

- The most accurate scores that you can, for as many students as you can, 7-7.5 hours per day, for seven (usually) straight days
- Your understanding of the curriculum and what students can accomplish in these essays
- The AP Reading experience (insight, contacts, ideas, confidence) to your future students



What you GET as an AP Reader:

- Contacts with high school and college writing teachers from around the world
- Experience with enough exams to make you an expert in the type that you read
- Truly, the best professional development available for writing instructors
- Travel, lodging, meals, AND a stipend



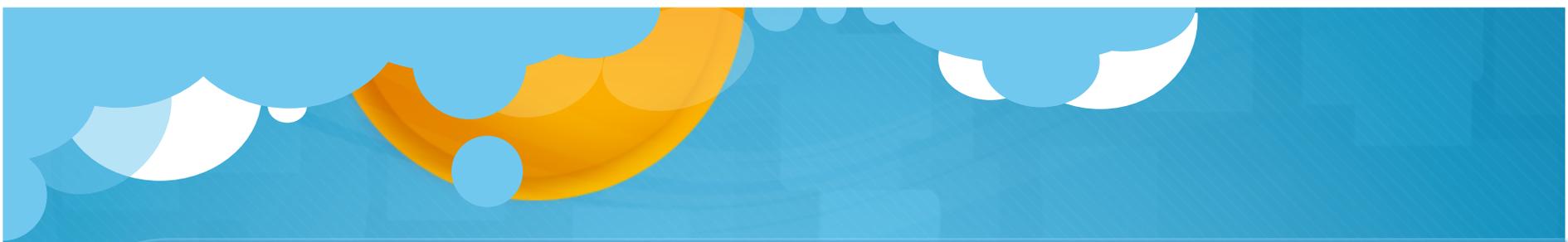
More “gettings”:

- Professional night (this year’s writer was William Least Heat Moon), College Board Night (answers to questions about AP generally and AP Lang specifically on separate nights)
- Limited-time access to a full range of questions and sample essays
- Opportunities unique to the city of the Reading—this year: tour of Langston Hughes’s childhood stomping grounds, talk by Tina Packer about *Women and Will* (Shakespeare), a view of Shakespeare’s First Folio, a Shakespeare-in-the-Park production of *Twelfth Night*



To Apply to be a Reader:

- <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/homepage/4137.html?excmpid=MTG2-ED-11-ewo>



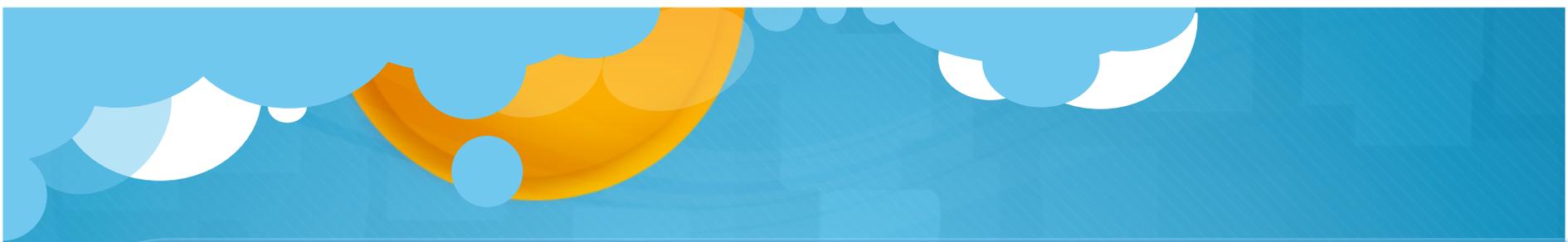
The Free-Response Section

- Follows one hour of multiple choice questions about (usually) four reading passages
- Students have a 15-minute reading period and a two-hour writing period
- In 2016, students were allowed to begin writing before the 15-minute reading period ended
- Students have three essays to write: one is definitely a synthesis, and the other two can be any combination of analysis and/or argument



Question 1: The Synthesis

- The synthesis is the first of the free-response (essay) questions
- Students are given directions, a writing prompt, and 5-7 reading passages
 - Students must read these sources (and the introductory information) critically. How does a news article differ from an editorial or a professional journal?
- Ideally, students will spend all fifteen minutes of the reading period preparing to write the synthesis essay



No disrespect intended:

- I show the following excerpts with the greatest respect for the students who wrote them.
- The examples are from this year's student essays.
- Given the right circumstances, any one of us could write a low-scoring essay.
- I submit these excerpts with appreciation for the opportunity to learn from them.



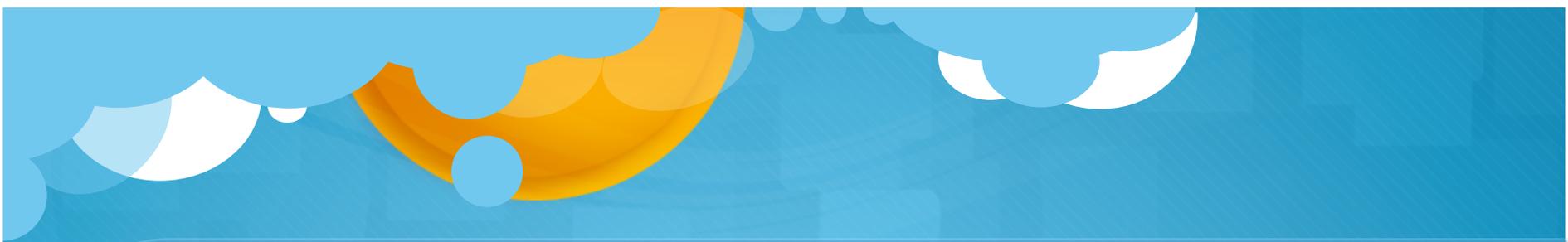
Non-negotiables:

- Write an essay in English
- Answer the **P**rompt!
- Take a position on the assigned topic
- Synthesize at least three of the given sources to develop the argument
- “Synthesize” means 1) using the sources to 2) develop a position and 3) citing the sources accurately
- Keep the writer’s (student’s) argument in focus



Mistake: writing something other than an essay in English

- Pictures, poems, song lyrics, cartoons, fiction, appeals to the Reader, whatever, no matter how clever, does not equal an essay
- While students are not penalized solely for failing to separate ideas into paragraphs, often those essays show little control over the elements of writing, and often the student's points are not clearly expressed.



Mistake: Not answering the given prompt

- o 2016 synthesis prompt: “Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize information from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay that argues a clear position on whether monolingual English speakers are at a disadvantage today.”

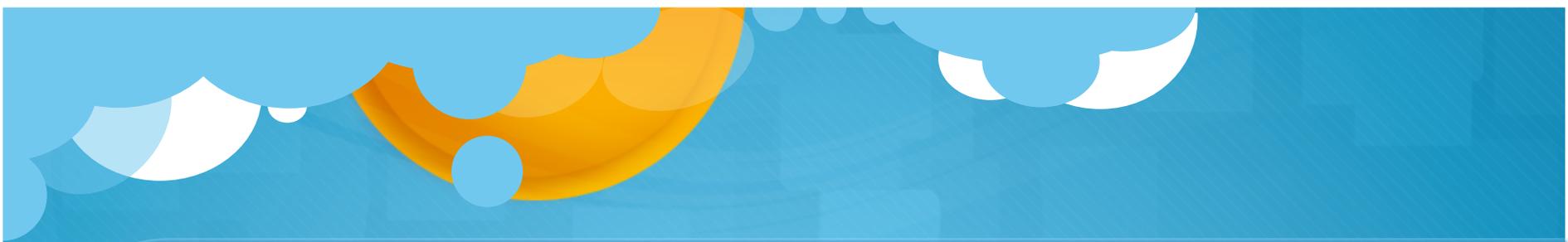
Two examples of not **A** the **P**:

- Monolingual people have the advantage of having better paid job due to knowing another language. **[at first it seems the writer will answer the prompt, but then the writer's confusion about the term *monolingual* (which is defined in the prompt) derails the writer's progress]**
- Ever since man has stepped foot on the land we call the United States, English has been it's [*sic*] dominant language. English has been an [*sic*] dominant language in international finance, science, and politics. **[no mention of advantage/ disadvantage for monolingual English speakers]**



Mistake: not taking a position

- Many low-scoring essays summarize sources, rather than establish and develop the writer's position
- Others, as in the example below, group sources and summarize the sources' argument, rather than establish the writer's own position:
 - Sources B, C, and E show that monolingual speakers are not at a disadvantage today.



Mistake: not synthesizing at least three of the given sources

No matter how good the writing...

- The top score for synthesizing two sources is a 4
- The top score for synthesizing one source is a 2

There are no “bonus points” for synthesizing more than three sources. The student should not attempt to incorporate all the given sources for the sole purpose of being impressive.



Mistake: failure to synthesize

- **Dropping in quotations:**

- Three reasons why include “language learning is not just technical mastery of a grammar but rather a ‘gateway’ to a thorough understanding of other societies...” (Source A), “employers who have to learn enough Spanish to speak to their employees” (Source C), and “225,505,953 total number of people spoke only English at home” (Source E).

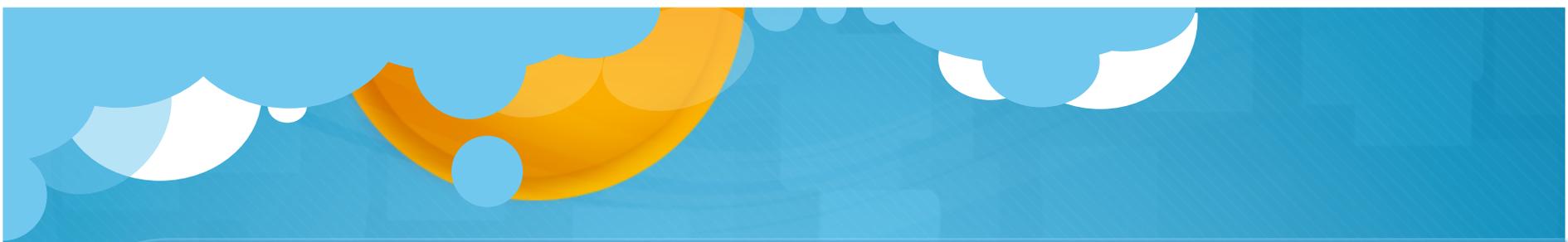
- **Citing sources without clearly incorporating:**

- Learning about a culture comes with learning the language. Understanding other points of views is important [in] today’s day and age (Oaks).



Mistake: failure to show the writer's voice

- Further instructions in the prompt direct students: “Your argument should be the focus of your essay. Use the sources to develop your argument and explain the reasoning for it.”
- Many essays with this mistake *sounded* like good essays; however, these writers were paraphrasing and summarizing the prompt and sources and not engaging with the topic. More on the writer's engagement will come—



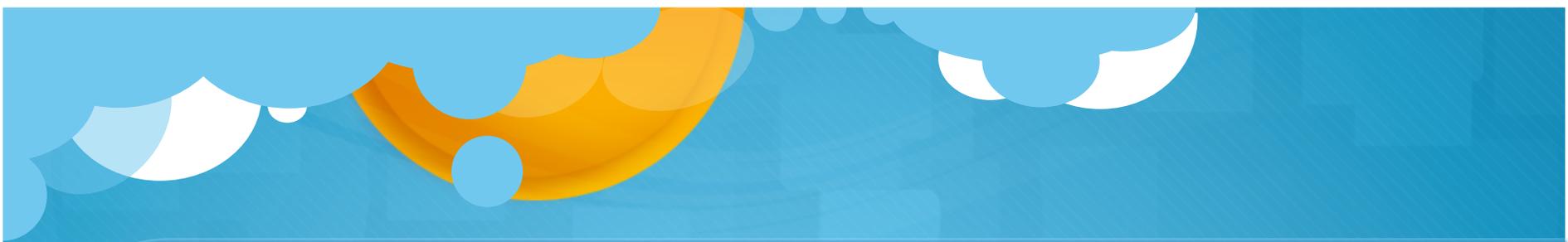
More mistakes to avoid:

- Missing out on the non-negotiables
- Writing a response tangential to the prompt
- Failing to use the sources by...
 - Dropping in quotations without using them to develop the argument
 - Dropping in citations without clearly using the source
- Mistaking claims for argument



Examples of tangential responses:

- English is the origin of all languages.
- Speakers of other languages will be at an advantage if they learn English.
- Schools should fund foreign language education.
- Everyone should learn Mandarin as it is the most commonly spoken language on Earth.



Failure to use the sources to develop the argument:

- First, “language learning is not just technical mastery of grammar but rather, in his words, a ‘gateway’ to a thorough understanding of other societies...” (Berman, Source A) This helps support the fact that a monolingual English speaker is at a disadvantage because it shows that you have to know at least some of another language in order to understand more and more of our society. Therefore, if you are a monolingual English speaker you are at a disadvantage.
- **Often these essays follow the formula: Quote, restate quote’s claim, conclude with quote or prompt paraphrased.**
- To “use the source,” the student must answer how or why the evidence leads to the claim in the topic sentence. Generally students are best served by NOT beginning the paragraph with a quotation.



Argument (arguably, every essay is an argument)

- An argument is made up of three parts:
 - Claim
 - Evidence
 - Reasoning/impact/interpretation



Mistaking claims for argument

- The topic sentence, evidence, and conclusion all say the same claim:
- Learning other languages in addition to English will, without a doubt, lead to intellectual self-improvements for each and every-one of us. Those who learn more languages “consistently display enhanced cognitive abilities relative to their monolingual peers.” (Source D). Research shows that they can think better because their brain becomes more flexible and discover new patterns, making it “create and maintain more circuits” (Source D). Thus, through language, we become better thinkers and more versatile in our daily lives.
- To avoid such over-claiming, the student should look for opportunities to say “because,” “as a consequence,” or similar phrases.



The best essays show the student's engagement and incorporate the sources to develop the argument:

Having learned a foreign language (or several), acquiring cultural knowledge, and expanding cognitive capacities, one can now enter the global arena of business and politics better-equipped than ever before. While some argue that there are far too many languages in the world (“6,900 living languages,” to be exact) for polylingualism to actually serve a purpose, their argument fails to consider the factor of circumstance (Thomas). A person will adapt to the languages they anticipate encountering. A prospective businessman might adopt some standard Mandarin or Arabic, two majority tongues in his field. I learnt Spanish as a child while attending a largely Hispanic school in California. While that may not help me in haggling with street-vendors in Kairo, it will help me when palling around with my Latino friends at school here in the States (where I’m much more likely to be than Egypt anyway).



The student's engagement:

- The example comes from the last body paragraph of the student's essay.
- It opens with a claim, phrased in the student's own words.
- It presents a counter argument that was raised in one of the sources and cites that source for both the fact and the summary.
- It specifically states the limitation of the source's opinion.
- It expands (from the initial claim) to illustrate what taking circumstance into account would look like.
- It embeds both hypothetical (the business man) and personal examples to illustrate the the reasonableness of the claim.



What I'll add/change next year:

- Rather “claim, evidence, reasoning.” I’m changing to “claim, evidence, *impact*.”
- Rather than “all sources are equally valid,” I’m teaching that “all sources are equally suspect.”
- In the early months of teaching timed writing, we’ll pause for a quick (self) quiz: “Without looking at the prompt or the source(s), write what you remember.”
- I’m using the title “Five Steps to a Five” to guide the number of revisions that students do. My goal is to help students work through the nonnegotiables and to distinguish their own voices in their writing.



Questions?

- o What do you do to develop voice?
 - o Copy the style of another writer (for my American lit friends: Hemingway, Faulkner, Dickinson, Whitman, Wheatley, ...) and discuss what we do to imitate that voice
 - o Highlight everything in the student's paper that is NOT summary, paraphrase, or quotation
 - o Use *They Say, I Say* templates to give students ideas of how to engage with the source(s)
 - o Free writing—answers to topical questions
 - o Given a text, rewrite in your own words (Fun one that taught me some new slang: Byron's "She Walks in Beauty")
 - o Use tracing paper over a student's essay to mark where periods occur. Is there little variation? Then you have a monotonous rhythm.
 - o Revise
- o ...and discuss

- o Thank you for your time! On to Suzanne! Q2—woo-hoo!