Coaching Students to Score on the AP Literature Exam Multiple-Choice Section

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Coaching Strategies

1) test analysis
2) time management
3) close reading
Pre-Game Pep Talk

• **Allow questions to guide reading.**
  Questions contain clues as to passage’s topic, focus, tone, and patterns.

• **Answer out of order.**
  Some questions require little in-depth reading; some require much. Questions are in order of their appearance in the passage—not in order of difficulty. Use your time economically.

• **Guess wisely.**
  Determine your own answer before examining the choices OR—more typically—use process of elimination (and cross out the choices you know are wrong). Focus on the question’s wording.

• **Read all the choices.**
  Don’t select the first right answer when a later option is better. Choose the best not simply a correct answer.

• **Be aggressive.**
  There’s no longer a penalty for guessing, so be confident.
The Game Plan: first quarter

Read questions first (but not choices). Identify crucial information.

- Circle verbs—and their modifiers.
- Underline the focus.
- Draw rectangles around literary terms.
- Double-underline NOT, LEAST, and EXCEPT.
Reading the Play Book

Pay particular attention to the verb of the question:

- asserts
- assumes
- describes
- compares
- contributes
- distinguishes
- draws attention to
- emphasizes
- employs
- evokes
- functions
- implies
- infers
- is characterized by
- is concerned with
- is interpreted to mean
- is understood as
- means
- paraphrases
- perceives
- presents
- refers
- represents
- reveals
- stands for
- suggests
- serves
- states
- uses
- views
Reading the Play Book

Pay particular attention to the modifiers of the question:

- clearly
- chiefly
- comparatively
- directly
- explicitly
- extensively
- figuratively
- in context
- most
- obviously
- probably
- primarily
- strongly
- EXCEPT
- LEAST
- NOT
The Game Plan: second quarter

Mark the passage.

• Underline or bracket sentences, phrases, or words specifically identified in questions.

• Write reading clues in the margins.
The Game Plan: third quarter

Choose the order.

• Identify the questions that can be answered quickly.

• Save whole-passage questions for last.
The Game Plan: fourth quarter

Tackle the questions.

• Answer questions as you encounter them in text.
• Use process of elimination actively.
• Realize that you don’t have to read the entire passage to answer most of the questions.
Select the MVP answer

- Look for distractors.
- Notice choices that are opposing.
- Exclude irrelevant options.
- Eliminate choices that are synonyms.
- Half wrong is all wrong.
- Distinguish between what’s stated and suggested.
Question Line-Up

Detail Questions

- focus on specific sentences, phrases, or words
- focus on particular literary devices and rhetorical strategies

General Comprehension Questions

- overall tone
- passage is primarily concerned with
- throughout the passage
- speaker’s character throughout
- central idea
- primary literary device
Question-Type Rankings

1. meaning (*inferred or interpreted*)
2. characterization
3. speaker’s identity, perceptions, or attitude
4. literary techniques
5. tone
6. vocabulary in context
7. rhetorical purpose
8. diction
9. organization (*order or structure*) and shift/change
10. pronoun/object reference
11. syntax
Watch the Clock

60 minutes total
4 or 5 passages

• Knowing the test format and learning time-management skills are crucial for a high score on the AP exam!
One-Passage Sprints

• **1 minute**: Mark questions and passage. (Answer questions for homework.)

• **2 minute**: Mark questions and passage; record 2 clues/ideas gleaned from questions.

• **3 minute**: Mark questions and passage; choose order in which to answer questions.

• **5 minutes**: Mark questions and passage; answer 2-3 questions (that don’t require reading the whole passage).

• **15 minutes**: Mark questions and passage; answer as many questions as possible within time limit.
Teamwork for Higher Scores

• **20 minutes (small group):**
  Work cooperatively to mark and answer questions for one passage. Everyone in the group must be able to explain the reasoning and evidence for each answer choice.

• **10 min. (individual) + 10 min. (small group):**
  Answer questions for one passage. Then, come to consensus as to best answer.

• **20 minutes (small group):**
  Start with the correct answers. Find evidence in passage to prove that correct answers are the best.

• **60 minutes (small group):**
  Choose a passage from current text and write twelve AP questions, including verb, question type, and modifiers.
Scorekeeping

Students log their progress with M-C questions. Guide students to know what types of passages they answer well and which are more challenging.

• date
• type of passage (prose or poetry)
• time period of passage
• # correct/total #
• percentage
• strategies employed
• difficulties encountered
• changes planned for improvement
Training Tips

*Students self-assess to determine strengths and weaknesses AND practice to improve.*

- Keep an individualized vocabulary log.
- Create multiple-choice questions. Teacher assigns verb, question type, and modifier. (effective reading check assignment)
- Prove that the best answer with textual evidence.
- Revise multiple-choice so that assessment is a learning experience.
- Work as a team; explain thinking process to teammates; convince each other with textual evidence.
Final Coaching Tips

• Encourage teamwork—especially first semester.
• Build towards independence.
• Practice often: 2-3 times a month first semester, weekly second semester.
• Use questions beyond College Board (Applied Practice, D & S Marketing, 5 Steps to a 5, Cliff’s, Barron’s, Princeton Review).
• Administer 2-3 full multiple-choice tests so that students are comfortable on the playing field.