

# Introduction to Multiple Choice

## Introduction

The first section of the AP exam. The number of questions used to vary, but now it standardized to fifty-five questions in an hour's time. There are usually four passages (two prose cuttings and two poems), and there's usually one "easy" passage and one "hard" passage for each type. There will be pre-twentieth literature, and there's usually at least one passage from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (though it will not go further back than the time of Shakespeare). It is worth 45% of your total grade.

## What percentage correct do I need?

If you get 40-50% right, it is possible you will pass with very good essays. However, you probably won't.

If you get 50-60% right, you have a reasonable shot at passing, but it could go either way. It depends on the quality of your essays.

If you get more than 60% right, you will probably pass, even with mediocre essays.

## Strategies

- **Focus on purpose when reading the passage.** There will be more than one question that will address this idea explicitly, and understanding the big idea will help you eliminate wrong answers.
- **Understand what the question is testing.** If you understand that a question is testing your knowledge of conflict, theme, tone, etc., you'll be in a better position to get the correct answer.
- **Look for answer choices that are functionally the same.** There cannot be two right answers, so both must be wrong.
- **Look for paired opposites:** Are there two choices seem to be the opposite of one another? One of them is likely the answer.
- **Look for paired qualifiers:** Are there two choices where one seems to be a stronger version of the other? One of them is likely to be the answer.
- This is the big one. **Do not look for the correct answer; instead look for wrong answers to eliminate.** There may be more than one (at least partially) correct answer for a question, but one answer choice will be more right than the others. The only way to find this consistently is to look for ways to eliminate pseudo-correct choices.

## Distractors

In test-writing jargon, these are incorrect answers that are designed to look correct. Here are the most common types for this test:

- **Ideas that are generally correct for the passage as a whole, but not for the line numbers in the question.**
- **Ideas that are reasonable sounding, but cannot be supported by text.**
- **Questions that are partially right and partially wrong.**
- **Questions that overstate an idea to the point that it is inaccurate.** Included in this category would be questions with *always* or *never* in them (though the AP test is seldom that unsubtle). There will usually be a less extreme version that is the correct answer.
- **Questions that understate an idea to the point that it is too generalized.** There will usually be a more specific version that is the correct answer.