Chapter 1

Scoping Out the Exam: An Overview

In This Chapter

- Previewing the format and content of the exam
- Examining how the test is scored
- Taking a close look at the logistics of AP exams

People who favor traditional education usually want schools to focus on "the three Rs" — reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. (Spelling is apparently not included in this worldview.) Traditionalists, therefore, love the AP English Language and Composition exam because it covers two-thirds of these basic areas: reading and 'riting . . .er, I mean *writing*. This exam, as well as the course that may be attached to it, concentrates on your skills as a writer and as a reader of other people's writing.

In this chapter I help you scope out the exam. I show you typical AP English Language and Composition questions and tell you everything you need to know about scoring, timing, and guessing. I also cover all the practical stuff in this chapter: how to find out when and where the test is held, what it costs, how scores are reported, and so forth.

What to Expect When You're Expecting to Take the AP English Language and Composition Exam

By this point in your academic career, I bet you've taken an awful lot of tests, some of which were, in fact, awful. The AP English Language and Composition exam is probably easier than many of the tests you've already suffered through, despite the fact that it's a little scary looking. It comes in a plastic, shrink-wrapped package with multicolored booklets and instructions that sound as if they were written by a prosecutor just itching to throw you into jail. Relax. It all boils down to two parts:

- **Multiple Choice:** You have one hour to answer approximately 55 questions (the number varies a bit from year to year) based on five or six reading passages. Each question is followed by five possible answers lettered A – E. You bubble your answers with a number two pencil onto an answer sheet.
- **Free Response:** This section throws three writing assignments at you, all essays, tucked into a little green booklet. You get a 15-minute reading period during which you can check out all the questions, read the passages supplied, and take notes in the question booklet. Then they let you open the pink answer booklet and write for two hours — approximately 40 minutes per essay.

Hitting a moving target

Many high school English teachers (including me) see the AP English Language and Composition exam as a moving target. The test has changed several times in the last few years, and it may morph again (and again!) in the future. Why hop around so much? One theory is that they're drinking way too many double-espressos in the College Board offices. A more likely explanation is that the AP test writers are responding to what today's college teachers want to see in a well-prepared student writer. The AP English Language and Composition course is roughly the equivalent of "Freshman Comp" or "Composition 101," and the exam is designed to show whether you've learned enough to get credit in that college class. More than in the past, such courses now stress use of sources and argument. So it's not surprising that in 2007 the College Board added a synthesis essay (see "Drafting AP Essays" later in this chapter for more information) to determine whether students can handle research material.

Others changes in the test are detectable only if you read a few decades' worth of AP questions. (This task is about as much fun as a visit to the dentist. Believe me, I've done both and I know). An extended survey reveals, for example, that paired-passage essays haven't shown up for a while. They may be gone for good, or, as some AP teachers believe, they're due for a comeback. Passages drawn from the Web are on the upswing, and specialized vocabulary to describe writing style seems to be increasingly important. Not to worry: in this book I cover all the bases, so you'll be ready no matter what shows up on test day.

As you see, the test itself gobbles up 3:15 hours of your life. As you plan for test day, add a 10-minute break between the multiple-choice and free-response sections and about 45 minutes for getting settled and bubbling registration information on the answer sheet — a little less if your school holds preregistration sessions and a little more if your proctor is the say-one-word-a-minute type. (More about registration and the logistics of test day appears in "Getting Practical" later in this chapter.)

The exam doesn't sound too bad, right? Okay, maybe it does sound bad. But the AP English Language and Composition test *is* manageable, especially if you prepare yourself — as you're doing right now — with this book.

Getting Up Close and Personal with Exam Questions

Why is the sky blue? Can I borrow the car tonight? Will high school ever end? These questions are crucial, but you won't find them on the AP English Language and Composition exam. Instead you encounter questions about *what* a writing passage says and *how* the passage says it. You also get a chance to argue (though not about the car-borrowing issue), analyze, and synthesize. This section zooms in for a closer look. First up is content — what sort of reading passages you'll meet. Next is format — a roll call of the type of multiple-choice and essay questions facing you.

Previewing AP passages

Appearing on an AP exam is the literary-world equivalent of opening on Broadway. The testmakers aim to include a good selection of quality literature in every test — the sort of reading assigned in college courses. The vast majority of passages are nonfiction selections from essays, speeches, letters, biographies or memoirs, and *exposition* (explanation) or description

from a variety of sources. Though the AP English Language and Composition test is officially the province of the English Department, subjects range from history to arts to politics to science to just about anything you can imagine. The test makers occasionally dip into fiction—usually a descriptive or a narrative passage. Once in a great while a speech from a play appears. The AP doesn't have a required reading list, so you won't see any questions that assume you've read a particular book. In fact, everything you need — except good writing and reading skills — is given to you by the test makers.

If rhymes make you break out in hives, you can rejoice in the fact that poetry never shows up on the exam, unless it's in the mouth of a Shakespearean character, in which case you may want to convince yourself that you're reading drama, not poetry.

In every exam, the AP test makers include something old and something new. Everything is "borrowed" from other writers, and nothing is printed in blue. (Sorry, I got carried away with the wedding reference.) You will probably see a seventeenth- or eighteenth- century passage, a little from the ninteenth century, and some modern works from the twentieth or twenty-first century. Striving for diversity, the AP makers generally test you on a couple of passages written by women or people of color. Works from any English-speaking country, as well as an occasional translation, are fair game. At least one passage has source citations (footnotes, parenthetical references, or a bibliography).

The AP test doesn't always include identifying information about a particular passage (the title, author, or date and circumstances of publication). If you see such information, *pay attention.* You may learn something that will help you answer the questions.

Every AP exam presents you with a range of reading difficulty, from "not so bad" to "what in the world does this mean?" Luckily for you, the hardest passages tend to be accompanied by relatively easy questions. Sadly, the reverse is also true. Selections that are simpler to decode are attached to tougher multiple-choice or essay questions.

Don't assume that a passage with simple vocabulary or *syntax* (grammatical structure) is a piece of cake. Such passages may have subtle points, a nuanced tone, or a complex attitude. Don't speed too quickly through an "easy" passage.

Life from A to E: The multiple-choice section

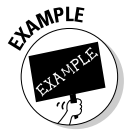
You've probably sat down a million times in your English classes to read a piece of great writing and discuss its style and content with your classmates. In my ideal world, the AP English Language and Composition test would allow AP graders to eavesdrop on that sort of discussion, evaluating your interpretations and observations. Unfortunately, AP Testland is *not* my ideal world. Instead of discussion, the test makers have poured tons of possible comments about a passage into ovals labeled A, B, C, D, and E. Your mission — and you must choose to accept it or see your AP grade fizzle like one of those tapes in *Mission Impossible* — is to find the oval that matches what you think is the right answer.

Some of the multiple-choice questions evaluate standard reading-comprehension skills such as vocabulary, inference, decoding the text, and so forth. About half the questions you encounter on the AP English Language and Composition test concern writing style: how the words are put together on the page and why the author made particular style choices. You may be queried about the passage as a whole or about only one or two words. Because content and style are closely related in good literature, style questions sometimes overlap with content questions. No matter. You don't have to label the questions, just answer them correctly.

Time to sample the merchandise. Here's an array of typical AP multiple-choice questions.

Vocabulary-in-context questions

A number of AP questions test whether you understand the meaning of a particular word or phrase in the context of the passage. Check out this example.



In line 12, "drip" may best be defined as

(A) a guy with a plastic pocket protector

(B) a type of coffeemaker

(C) the sound that keeps you up until 3 a.m. every night

(D) what spaghetti sauce does on your favorite shirt

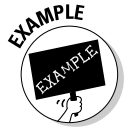
(E) the normal state of an infant's mouth

I don't know what the answer is, though in my house (D) is always a good bet. To answer this type of question, you have to go back to line 12. If a biographer is explaining why Supermodel Sue rejected a once-in-a-lifetime chance to attend a flea circus, (A) is probably the answer. If someone's preparing dinner, go for (B).

One annoying aspect of "vocabulary-in-context" questions is that most of the choices are actual definitions of the word they're asking you to define. Don't jump on an answer too quickly. Be sure the definition fits the way the word is used in the passage.

Specialized vocabulary questions

Like every other subject area, English has its own specialized vocabulary that describes elements of writing. These terms may appear in either the question or the answer choices. Take a peek at this example.



Which technique does the author employ in lines 18–23?

(A) figurative language

(B) apostrophe

(C) synecdoche

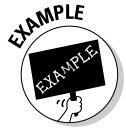
(D) allusion

(E) parallel structure

For specialized vocabulary questions, the answer is outlined in neon lights if you know the terms. If you don't, you're flying blind. (Eyesight trouble? Don't panic. I review these terms in Chapters 4 through 6.)

Antecedent questions

Another type of question lurking on the AP exam involves pronouns, those pesky little words that replace nouns. Usually you have to explain what a pronoun means by finding the word it refers to — its *antecedent*.



The antecedent of "that" (line 54) is

(A) Massachusetts (line 2)

(B) nude sunbathing (line 48)

(C) toe jam (line 49)

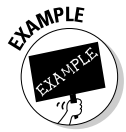
(D) hippo (line 50)

(E) algae (line 57)

Finding an antecedent is fairly easy. Just substitute each answer for the pronoun and see which one makes sense.

Factual questions

You may occasionally be asked to identify a stated fact. This type of question is frequently attached to old (pre-nineteenth century) passages. The AP test makers want to know that you can decode works from earlier centuries. Take a look at the following example.



What is Mortimer's reason for leaving his dead lover?

(A) It was time to take ye olde AP exam.

(B) He had to bury the murder weapon.

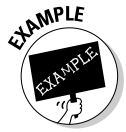
(C) His "buy one, get one free" coupon was about to expire.

(D) His curfew was 9 p.m.

(E) He had jury duty.

The good news about stated-fact questions is that the answer is actually in the passage. The bad news is that you probably have to burrow through a mound of antiquated language to find the answer.

A variation of the factual question looks for equivalents, as in this example.



Which statement is the equivalent of line 42 ("And she was never seen again")?

(A) "Nevermore would anyone stare at her pimple" (line 80)

(B) "She had been poetry-in-motion, but now she was history" (line 82)

(C) "The 5:42 was a one-way trip" (line 88)

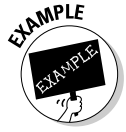
(D) "Mars afforded permanent escape" (line 99)

(E) "Everyone she knew disdained the special eclipse-proof glasses" (line 111)

To answer one of these beauties, step back and examine the big picture. What point is the author making about the fact that "she was never seen again"? If the passage is about a train wreck, (C) is a good bet. If you've been reading about space travel, opt for (D).

Inference questions

Inference resides in "read between the lines" territory. These questions make you put on your Sherlock Holmes hat and find the clues pointing to the answer, which is *not* directly stated in the passage. Check out this example.



Eleanor probably refused to wear the pink dress because

(A) it clashed with her orange nose ring.

(B) she had worn pink on her last date with Mortimer.

(C) pink was "so-o-o last year."

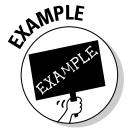
(D) the pink dress was evidence in the bank robbery.

(E) no dress was good enough for Eleanor.

The preceding example resembles a straightforward factual question, but the word "probably" tells you that you have to draw a conclusion. Spread your net wide and gather relevant information. If Eleanor turned up her nose at an Armani outfit, (E) is the answer you seek. If the passage rambles on about complementary colors, (A) may win.

Main idea questions

Main idea questions make you hold an umbrella over the content of the entire passage or of a portion of the passage. Like an umbrella, your answer should be wide enough to cover everything but not so huge as to put someone's eye out. Here's an example.



What is the main idea of paragraph three (lines 69–92)?

(A) Children riding bicycles should be encased in bubble wrap.

(B) Bicycle riding is dangerous.

(C) Accidents claim many lives every year.

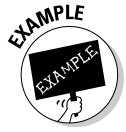
(D) Lola should never have opened the car door without looking both ways.

(E) Lola should be banned from public highways.

A question like this sends you back to paragraph three. Does everything in the paragraph fit the answer you chose? If not, your answer is too narrow. Look for the most specific answer that includes everything in the designated lines.

Purpose

You also have to read between the lines for questions about the author's purpose, as in this example.



The narrator relates the story of Adam's apple injury (lines 14–18) in order to

(A) prove to the reader that Adam was fatally careless

(B) qualify his statement that "Adam was a lucky guy" (line 4)

(C) reveal the reason for Adam's fear of red, fruit-shaped objects

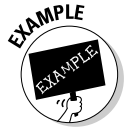
(D) contrast Adam's carelessness with Olivia's timidity

(E) persuade the reader that thrown fruit can be deadly

The preceding example is best answered by imagining the passage *without* the story of Adam and the apple. What changes? For example, suppose Olivia seems bolder when she's not compared with Adam. Okay, Adam's there to reveal Olivia's character.

Tone and attitude questions

Still more "big picture" questions tackle tone and attitude — of a person or character in the passage or of the author. Look at this example.



The attitude of the author toward global warming may best be characterized as

(A) detached

(B) critical

(C) dismissive

(D) alarmed

(E) distraught

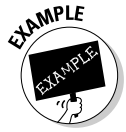
This type of question is easy as long as you read carefully. If the author says that the planet simply needs more air conditioners to combat global warming, darken oval (C). If the author explains how he "howled at the moon" and "imagined the earth melting into the sky," go for (E).

The same strategy often works nicely for questions about *tone*, which is the author's or character's "voice" on the page. To determine tone, pay close attention to individual word choices and to what is included or left out of the passage. Imagine that the preceding example queries you about "tone" instead of "attitude," with the same answer choices. If the passage refers to "environmental catastrophe," the author's tone is definitely not "dismissive," choice (C), or "detached," choice (D). Other words in the passage may help you decide which of the remaining answers works best.

Tone and attitude questions often come with paired answers ("detached and thoughtful," for example.) Be sure *both* adjectives work when choosing an answer.

Structure questions

How is the passage organized? By time, order of importance, or something else? Structure questions ask you to perceive the skeleton of logic that holds the passage or a paragraph together, as in this example.



Which word or phrase best describes paragraph three (lines 44–56)?

(A) comparison and contrast

(B) chronological order

(C) spatial order

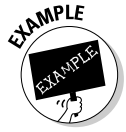
(D) claim and evidence

(E) cause and effect

Fire up your X-ray vision when you answer a structure question. Ignore the details and check out the *order* in which things appear in the paragraph or passage. Determining what's where points you toward the correct answer.

Citation questions

Adding to the true joy of 3:15 hours of AP test-taking are questions about source citations — footnotes, parenthetical, or bibliographic citations. Rest assured: you won't find any questions about whether a comma has been correctly placed. You will be asked to explain what a citation means, as illustrated in the following example.



Which of the following statements about footnote 2 is correct?

(A) Paris Hilton is the author of the article entitled "Dogs I Have Owned."

(B) The article was published in a suite at the Hilton in Paris, France.

(C) The information about Paris was provided by the Hilton Hotel chain.

(D) The information about Paris was provided by a small dog.

(E) The article was published in 1802 and revised in 2002.

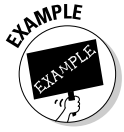
Citations are a world unto themselves, but you can navigate them with the help of Chapter 14.

Drafting AP essays

After an hour of untangling multiple-choice answers, you get a measly 10-minute rest before hitting the essay section (which, by the way, has been known to hit back). First you read for 15 minutes, jotting notes in the margin of your question booklet. Then you start writing. The questions vary from year to year, but a few are constant.

Synthesis

Making its debut in 2007, the synthesis essay requires you to read and digest six or seven sources about a particular issue. The sources are usually short or excerpted news stories, editorials, letters, or Web postings. At least one of the sources is visual — a chart, graph, cartoon, or photo. You take a stand on the issue and support your position with references to at least three of the sources. Here's an example.

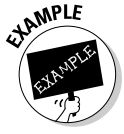


The usefulness of the $100,000 dollar bill has been questioned by government officials, but many consumers find this type of currency essential. Read the following sources carefully. Then write an essay in which you develop a position on the desirability of the $100,000 bill in the United States currency system. Synthesize at least three of the six sources to support your stance. In your essay, attribute both direct and indirect citations.

This may seem like a ridiculous question, but a recent AP synthesis essay questioned the usefulness of the penny. One of the sources — I kid you not! — was a photo of a penny. For help with the synthesis essay, turn to Chapters 16 and 17.

Style analysis

This one usually shows up solo (one passage) but occasionally with a partner (paired passages). You have to read the selection(s) and explain how the writing technique relates to another element. For example, they may ask you to explain how the author's attitude or purpose is revealed by her *rhetorical strategy* (a fancy word for writing style). If you're dealing with twins, you have to compare techniques. Check out this question.

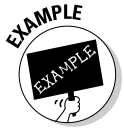


Read this excerpt from Pablo Picasso's *My Art and Peanut Butter: A Memoir.* Then, in a well-written essay, discuss how the author's attitude toward chunky nut-spreads is revealed by the rhetorical devices he employs.

The big deal here is that you have to analyze and discuss the effect of the techniques you identify in the passage, not simply list them. For a review of rhetorical devices, turn to Part II.

Argument

If you're a debater, this question's for you. The AP makers may throw a letter to the editor or an editorial at you, or they may simply provide a provocative quotation. You have to agree or disagree with the position stated in the passage or quotation. You may also adopt a stance that partly agrees, with some objections. Here's a sample question.



Bernice Woodchick once noted that "no man is an island, but quite a few are peninsulas because they're just too shy to date." Ms. Woodchick's observation has often been cited in support of computerized dating services. In a well-written essay, develop a position on the efficacy of computer matchmaking. Support your position with evidence from literature, history, or personal experience.

The crucial element of this essay is support. The graders don't care what you think, but they do care about *how* you think. They want to know that you can construct a convincing argument.

Knowing the Score: Grades and Reports

Psychometrician. Sounds like a crazy person obsessed with tape measures and rulers, right? But in AP World, a *psychometrician* is someone who checks the questions on every exam, looking for just the right weighting to produce reliable, standardized results that sort students the same way no matter which year they take the test. Too many easy questions, and

the psychometrician toughens the formula so that more correct answers are needed for a good grade. Too many hard questions, and the exam is curved downward. Either way, the psychometricians aim to ensure that every AP score means more or less the same thing.

The score you see ranges from 1 to 5, with 5 cause for celebration and 1 for consolation. The scores break down this way:

5: Extremely well qualified (equals an A in Freshman Comp)

4: Well qualified (in the B range for Freshman Comp)

3: Qualified (C territory)

2: Possibly qualified (D, if the teacher's in a good mood)

1: No recommendation (and also no passing grade)

What do these scores mean to colleges? If they see a 3, 4, or 5, most will be happy. A bunch of hard-to-get-into colleges turn up their noses at anything lower than a 4. A score of 1 or 2 won't help you much, either with college admission or with placement.

Some colleges give you actual credit (usually two or three credits) for a good AP grade. This practice saves you actual money, as you then have to take fewer courses to graduate. Some colleges don't give you credit (they want the actual money), but they exempt you from the Freshman Comp requirement. Some just smile and give you nothing tangible, though a good AP score always helps your chances for admission.

Multiple-choice scoring

The multiple-choice section counts for 45 percent of your total score. The good news is that you can get a bunch of multiple-choice questions wrong and still pass. For example, if you miss as many as a third of the multiple-choice questions and score 6 out of 9 on the essay section, you're in the running for a 3. (See the preceding section for an explanation of the significance of AP scores and the next section to interpret the meaning of the essay scores.)

Multiple-choice questions are scored in this way:

- Every correct answer receives one point.
- Each question you leave blank receives no points.
- A wrong answer deducts ¼ point from your multiple-choice total.
- Totals are plugged into a math formula that spits out the "converted score." (Don't ask. No one but the College Board needs to know what a converted score is.)

All you math geniuses out there have already figured out that random guessing is a bad idea, because you lose more for a wrong answer than a blank. However, if you can eliminate two of the five choices, you may as well take a stab at the question because the odds favor you.

Essay scoring

The essay section comprises 55 percent of your total score. Each of the three essays counts the same, and a blank answer lops a third from your essay grade. The moral of the story: don't spend 90 minutes on one essay, 30 minutes on another, and 0 minutes on the remaining question. Divide your two hours more or less evenly — about 40 minutes per essay.

The essays are read by college English professors and high-school English teachers who reside in a hotel for a week drinking record-breaking amounts of caffeinated beverages. A group of teachers at one table reads the responses to a single question. In other words, one table is stuck with hundreds of synthesis essays, another table with stacks of the analysis essay, and so on. A table leader — a sort of Super Grader — reads and checks the work of anyone new to the process, and psychometricians (people who understand statistics) check that the essay grade is more or less in sync with the multiple-choice grade. If the scores on the two portions of the exam seem mismatched, the essay is rechecked by a table leader.

Each essay receives a score between 0 and 9, awarded to the essay as a whole. Graders don't write comments on the paper, and they don't deduct 10 percent for bad grammar or give you 30 percent for an excellent introduction. Nines are extremely rare. One grader told me that she read 1,200 essays one year and came up with only 13 nines. Here's a general guide to essay scores:

0: The question was not answered.

1, 2, or 3: The essay is overly simple and poorly written or reflects a misreading of the passage or assigned task. An essay in this category tends to repeat or summarize information from the passage or make unsupported arguments. Two is the highest score an essay can receive if the grammar and spelling are bad enough to impede the reader.

4, 5, or 6: Now things are looking up. Essays in this slot do the job; they synthesize, analyze, or argue reasonably well, and they include a fair amount of supportive evidence. They are written with some, but not many, grammar and spelling errors, and the writing style is adequate. However, they're not as sophisticated as essays on the next rung.

7, 8, or 9: Be still my beating heart! These essays show that students have been learning what we English teachers have been teaching. They get the job done smoothly, efficiently, and properly. The content and style would rate a good grade if written in a timed, in-class situation in a college course.

After the graders have plopped a number on your essay, the numbers make their way to still another formula, where the three essay scores are combined and converted and mixed into one last formula, whereupon a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 pops out.

Reporting the scores

About two months after the test, you receive an envelope in the mail with your AP score inside. Or, if you pay extra (currently $8), you can get an early report by phone. The toll-free number is 888-308-0013 for the United States and Canada. Outside this area, the number is 609-771-7300. Your English teacher also gets a report sometime during the summer. If you asked that your score be reported to a college, the college also hears the news in July. The first college report is free; if you want additional score reports, you have to fork over $15 (or $25 if you're in a rush) for each extra college.

To access grades by phone or to request extra score reports, you need a valid credit card and your Student Pack. (See "Getting Practical" in this chapter for more information on Student Packs.)

A few more details on score reports:

- All the APs you ever took in your entire life show up on the same score report, not just the most recent one, unless you cancelled a score or paid to have it withheld.

- You can cancel a score until mid-June — an option you may want to take advantage of if you lost your way, your memory, or your mind on the day of the exam. To cancel a score, speak with your teacher or your school's AP Coordinator or log on to www.collegeboard.com. If you cancel a score, it vanishes forever. No one, including you, will ever know how you did. Don't expect a refund. You're cancelling the result, not the test.
- You can withhold a score from a college, though you must pay $10 per college and make a written request to the College Board by mid-June. The score will still be reported to you and to your high school, and if you change your mind, you can release the score to colleges at a later date, after paying a few more bucks.
- For a fee of $7, the College Board will send you the essays you wrote. You'll see the score written on the essay, but no comments or corrections. If you plan to take the AP exam twice (and if so, you'll have to wait a whole year as the exam is given only in May), reviewing your essays with a teacher or tutor is a good idea.

Take a look at the College Board Web site (www.collegeboard.com) or call 888-225-5427 for anything to do with score reporting, cancellations, and the like.

Getting Practical

No matter how prepared you are for the exam, you can't do well — in fact you can't do anything — unless you take the test. If you're enrolled in an AP English Comp course, your teacher will probably tell you how to sign up and when and where the exam is given. If you are home schooled or if the school you attend doesn't offer an AP program, you can still take the exam. Call 888-225-5427 for the contact information of the nearest AP Coordinator. (The coordinator is the person in charge of ordering the tests, scheduling proctors, and so forth.) You will receive a special code number from the coordinator, and you'll have to bring this number and a government-issued photo ID (such as a passport or driver's license) to the exam.

Your photo on a school identification card isn't enough on AP day if you're not taking the test in your own school, where everyone knows you. Only a government-issued ID is acceptable.

Completing pre-exam chores

Apart from practicing the skills tested, you have a few additional chores to complete before the AP exam. (Students with special needs have even more to do. See the next section, "Meeting Special Needs," for more information.) Here's the general list:

- **January or February:** Pick up a student bulletin. This handy pamphlet published by the College Board is probably stacked in the College Counseling or Guidance Office of your school. If you can't find one, ask a teacher, administrator, or the school's AP Coordinator. The student bulletin explains when the test is given, provides an up-to-date fee schedule, and tells you the most current information about the exam.

  A student bulletin is available for downloading from www.collegeboard.com/apstudents. No Internet access? Call 888-225-5427 for information.
- **Early February:** Students who need accommodations on the test but haven't been certified by the College Board must submit documentation. (See "Meeting Special Needs" for more information.)

- **Mid- to late February:** Students previously certified as needing accommodations on the exam must check that the school has sent in the required forms. ("Meeting Special Needs" later in this chapter explains everything.)
- **March:** Check your calendar. If you have a scheduling conflict (two APs at the same time or a state-championship game during the essay section, for example), talk with the AP Coordinator by mid-March. A makeup date is available for unavoidable conflicts. Depending upon the conflict, the College Board may charge you nothing or as much as $40.
- **Late April**: Homeschoolers and those who are taking the test in a different school should make a practice run to the exam site. (Can't you see yourself on Test Day, lost in a swirl of unfamiliar streets?)

Arriving at the exam

On the day of the test, plan to arrive about 15 minutes early at the exam room. You will meet your proctor there — the teacher who supervises the test — and receive your student pack. The student pack is a small pamphlet containing labels with a number that belongs to you alone for your entire AP life. You have to fill in some information (unless your school held a preregistration session). Then you'll hear a couple of last-minute instructions, mostly concerning what can and can't be in the room. Because surprise is not a fun emotion on Test Day, here are what you *must* and what you *cannot* bring to the AP test.

What you must bring into the testing room

Be sure you have these items:

- **Pens with blue or black ink.** Erasable pens are okay but not the best choice because they can smudge and make reading difficult for the graders. No one wants a grader with eyestrain.
- **Number two pencils.** I have no idea why you can't use a #1 or a #3 pencil, or even if any other numbers exist. Just be sure that your pencils are number twos.
- **A watch.** The test room probably has a clock, but you may not be able to see it easily.
- **A special code number, a government-issued photo ID, and a Student Pack,** if you're not taking the exam in your own school.
- **Your College Board SSD Accommodations letter,** which is issued to students with special needs. (Check out "Meeting Special Needs" later in this chapter for more information.)
- **Your mind.** Always a useful accessory and never out of style.

What you cannot bring into the testing room

Leave these things home or in your car:

- **Highlighters or pens with ink that isn't black or blue.** Why? The AP moguls are worried that you'll glance at the smartest kid in the school, see the highlights on his or her exam, focus more on those sections, and gain an advantage.
- **Cell phones, iPods, MP3 players, PDAs, or any sort of electronic device.** For these few hours, silence and *nothing else* flows into your ears.

- **Food or drink.** Not even water, though you can drink and eat during the break. They're worried that you'll copy something on the label or that you'll rearrange the atoms in your turkey sandwich into a spell-check or something like that. Whatever — no refreshments.

  If you have a medical condition that requires you to eat, drink, or take medicine during the exam, check with the AP Coordinator well in advance of the test — by late February or early March.
- **Books, papers, teddy bears, and anything else in the entire world.** Depending upon your proctor, you may bring a purse or bookpack, which you will have to leave in the front of the room or under your seat. But make things easy on yourself: Leave your junk in your locker or car trunk.

Meeting special needs

If your school grants you accommodations for special needs — additional time, a computer for writing essays, Braille exams or a reader, and so forth — chances are the AP will do the same. However, don't assume anything. Take charge of the situation:

- By late January of the year you intend to take the test, talk with the AP Coordinator in your school about your needs. Homeschoolers or those whose schools don't have an AP program should call 888-225-5427 for the name and location of the nearest AP Coordinator.
- Before mid-February, ask the AP Coordinator if your school has submitted an official College Board "student eligibility form" for you. The same form is applicable to the AP, the SAT, and the PSAT/NMSQT — the whole alphabet of tests that the College Board administers. However, the AP may not grant you the same accommodations that you received on another test.
- If you recently switched schools or if your need for accommodations has changed, you need a new eligibility form. You may also have to send in additional documentation. Because the College Board takes up to seven weeks to process these forms, you have to start early. Again, mid-February gives you ample time to correct any foul-ups. Remember, you're dealing with two bureaucracies, the school and the College Board. Mistakes happen!
- If your special need pops up at the last minute (perhaps you're in a full-body cast because of a preseason scrimmage with the football team), tell the AP Coordinator right away. He or she will call the College Board to request accommodations for you.
- If your special need resides in your bank account, you can apply for a reduced rate. As of this writing, the AP exam costs $84, but drops to $54 for students who qualify for a discount. Depending upon where you live, your state or school district may subsidize more of this amount, making your out-of-pocket expense even lower.

The College Board Web site has a helpful section for students who have special needs (`www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html`). You can also contact the College Board's Services for Students with Disabilities Office at 609-771-7137 (TTY 609-882-4118).

Once the College Board has reviewed your paperwork, they'll issue you an SSD Accommodations Letter. If you do not receive it by the beginning of April, check with your AP Coordinator. You must bring the accommodation letter to the exam.