

1. EXAM FORMAT AT A GLANCE

SECTION	QUESTIONS	TIME	WEIGHT
Section I: Multiple Choice	45 questions	60 min	45%
5 passages with 8–11 questions each. Mix of nonfiction prose from various periods and disciplines.			
Section II: Free Response	3 essays	2 hrs 15 min	55%
Q1: Synthesis	1 essay	~40 min*	Each essay is scored 0–6 and weighted equally (~18.3% each)
Q2: Rhetorical Analysis	1 essay	~40 min*	
Q3: Argument	1 essay	~40 min*	

*15-min reading period at start of Section II, then 2 hours to write all 3 essays. Suggested ~40 min each, but manage your own time.

Score Scale: 1–5. Typically: 5 = 72–100% composite | 4 = 57–71% | 3 = 42–56% | 2 = 27–41% | 1 = 0–26%. A 3+ earns college credit at most institutions.

2. ESSENTIAL RHETORICAL DEVICES & TERMS

Ethos — Appeal to credibility/character of the speaker

Pathos — Appeal to audience's emotions

Logos — Appeal to logic, reason, evidence

Kairos — Appeal to timeliness/urgency of the moment

Tone — Author's attitude toward subject/audience

Diction — Word choice and its connotative effects

Syntax — Sentence structure, length, arrangement

Imagery — Vivid sensory language that creates pictures

Juxtaposition — Placing contrasting ideas side by side

Anaphora — Repetition of a word/phrase at the start of successive clauses

Antithesis — Contrasting ideas in balanced parallel structure

Parallelism — Repeated grammatical structure for emphasis

Rhetorical Question — Question asked for effect, not answer

Hyperbole — Deliberate exaggeration for emphasis

Understatement — Deliberately minimizing something's importance

Irony — Gap between expectation and reality (verbal, situational, dramatic)

Satire — Using humor/irony to criticize and expose flaws

Allusion — Reference to well-known person, event, work, place

Analogy — Extended comparison to explain complex idea

Metaphor — Direct comparison without "like" or "as"

Concession — Acknowledging the opposing viewpoint

Refutation — Disproving the opposing viewpoint

Qualifier — Word that limits/modifies a claim (some, often, may)

Shift — Change in tone, subject, speaker, or perspective

Chiasmus — Reversed parallel structure (AB-BA pattern)

Asyndeton — Omitting conjunctions for speed/emphasis

Polysyndeton — Repeating conjunctions for accumulation effect

Litotes — Affirming something by negating its opposite ("not bad")

Synecdoche — Part represents whole ("all hands on deck")

Metonymy — Related term substitutes for something ("the Crown" = monarchy)

Aphorism — Short, memorable statement of truth or opinion

Epistrophe — Repetition of word/phrase at the end of successive clauses

MCQ Power Tip: The exam tests whether you can identify HOW a device functions in context, not just name it. Always ask: "What effect does this create? How does it serve the author's purpose?"

3. TOP 10 MOST-TESTED CONCEPTS

- Author's Purpose & Argument** — Why did the author write this? What are they trying to achieve? This is the single most important concept on the entire exam.
- Rhetorical Strategies & Their Effects** — Not just naming devices, but explaining how they advance the author's argument or affect the audience.
- Audience Awareness** — Who is the intended audience? How does the author tailor language, evidence, and appeals to that audience?
- Tone & Tone Shifts** — Identifying the author's attitude and tracking how/where it changes within a passage. Use precise tone words, not vague ones.
- Evidence & Reasoning** — Types of evidence (anecdotal, statistical, expert testimony, historical) and how they support claims.
- Structure & Organization** — How the arrangement of ideas (chronological, cause/effect, compare/contrast, problem/solution) serves the purpose.
- Synthesis of Multiple Sources** — Combining information from different sources to build a coherent, original argument.
- Concession & Rebuttal** — Acknowledging counterarguments and then refuting them. This is expected in high-scoring essays.
- Diction Analysis** — Specific word choices and their connotative weight. Cluster analysis (groups of related words) is key.
- Line of Reasoning** — How the sequence of claims and evidence builds logically from thesis to conclusion. Readers must see clear progression.

4. THE 3 FRQ TYPES — STRATEGY FOR EACH

Q1 SYNTHESIS ESSAY

You receive 6–7 sources (mix of text + visual). Write an argument using at least 3 sources as evidence.

- Read the prompt first**, then skim sources strategically. Don't read every word — look for usable quotes, data points, and opposing views.
- Use at least 4 sources** (minimum 3 required, but 4+ shows command). Cite as (Source A), (Source B), etc.
- Don't just summarize sources.** Use them as evidence that YOU control. Your argument drives; sources support.
- Include a counterargument** from one source and refute it. This is the fastest path to Row C (Sophistication) points.
- Use at least one visual source** (chart, graph, image) as evidence with specific detail.

Q2 RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY

Analyze HOW an author builds an argument. You receive one passage (speech, essay, letter).

- Identify the SOAPS:** Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject. This frames your analysis.
- Choose 2–3 rhetorical strategies** to analyze in depth. Quality over quantity. Don't list 10 devices superficially.
- Use specific textual evidence** — embed short quotes and cite line numbers. Every claim needs proof from the passage.
- Always explain the EFFECT:** "The author uses [device] to [effect on audience], which advances the argument by [connection to purpose]."
- Track shifts** — note where tone, strategy, or focus changes. Discussing shifts shows sophisticated reading.

Q3 ARGUMENT ESSAY

Take a position on a given claim/topic. You get a short quote or idea to respond to. No sources provided — use your own knowledge.

- Take a clear, defensible position.** Avoid wishy-washy "it depends" theses. Pick a side and argue it.
- Use diverse evidence:** history, literature, current events, science, personal experience (sparingly). Aim for at least 3 distinct examples.
- Each body paragraph** = one clear claim + specific evidence + analysis of how it proves your thesis.
- Address a counterargument** and explain why your position is still stronger. Concession + rebuttal = sophistication.
- Don't just list examples.** Explain WHY each piece of evidence supports your argument. Analysis is everything.

5. SCORING RUBRIC — WHAT GETS A 6 VS. A 3

Each FRQ is scored 0–6 across three rows. Understanding the rubric is your biggest advantage.

ROW	POINTS	WHAT READERS LOOK FOR
Row A: Thesis	0–1	A defensible thesis that establishes a clear line of reasoning . Must do more than restate the prompt. Must be a specific, arguable claim.
Row B: Evidence + Commentary	0–4	Specific evidence + analysis explaining how evidence supports your thesis. 4 pts = specific evidence with consistently thorough commentary that explains the significance. 1–2 pts = vague evidence or summary without analysis.
Row C: Sophistication	0–1	Demonstrates a nuanced understanding. This can mean: exploring complexity/tension, explaining broader implications, using an effective style throughout, or situating the argument in a wider context.

SCORE 5–6 ESSAYS

- Clear, specific, arguable thesis
- Multiple pieces of specific evidence with embedded quotes
- Deep commentary explaining WHY evidence matters
- Addresses complexity or counterarguments
- Controlled, purposeful prose style

SCORE 2–3 ESSAYS

- Vague thesis that restates the prompt
- Generic evidence or unsupported claims
- Summary instead of analysis
- Ignores counterarguments entirely
- Disorganized or formulaic structure

6. COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- **Listing devices without explaining their effect.** "The author uses a metaphor" earns nothing. You must explain what the metaphor DOES and how it serves the argument.
- **Summarizing instead of analyzing.** The #1 killer of FRQ scores. Don't retell what the author said. Explain HOW and WHY they said it.
- **Writing a 5-paragraph essay.** The AP readers don't want a rigid formula. Organize around your argument, not a template. 3-5 focused paragraphs work best.
- **Ignoring the prompt.** Read every word of the prompt carefully. Answer what it asks. If it says "analyze the rhetorical strategies," don't write an argument essay.
- **Using vague tone words.** "The tone is good" or "negative" is worthless. Use precise words: sardonic, reverent, indignant, contemplative, defiant, earnest.
- **Spending too long on one essay.** All three are weighted equally. A perfect Q1 and two unfinished essays will score lower than three solid essays.
- **Not citing sources in Synthesis.** You must reference sources by their letter designation. Unreferenced evidence doesn't count.
- **Skipping the reading period.** The 15 minutes are for reading and planning, not writing. Use them to annotate and outline. Students who plan score higher.

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Quick Reference & Test Day Strategy

7. THESIS FORMULA TEMPLATES

Adapt these to any prompt. Never use them word-for-word—make them specific to the passage/topic.

SYNTHESIS: Although [counterargument/concession], [your position] because [reason 1], [reason 2], and [reason 3].

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: [Author] employs [strategy 1], [strategy 2], and [strategy 3] to [author's purpose] for [his/her] audience of [specific audience].

ARGUMENT: [Specific position on the claim] because [reason], as evidenced by [type of evidence you'll use]. While [concession to opposing view], [why your position holds].

Key Rule: Your thesis must be **defensible** (someone could disagree), **specific** (not vague), and it must establish a **line of reasoning** (preview how you'll support it). Place it in your introduction—usually the last sentence of your opening paragraph.

8. ARGUMENT STRUCTURE TEMPLATE

PARAGRAPH	CONTENT & FUNCTION
Introduction	Hook (relevant context, not a dictionary definition) → Bridge (connect to the issue) → Thesis (defensible claim + line of reasoning)
Body 1	Topic sentence (first claim supporting thesis) → Evidence (specific example, quote, or data) → Commentary (2-3 sentences explaining HOW evidence proves your point) → Link back to thesis
Body 2	Same structure as Body 1, different claim/evidence. Build on Body 1—show progression of reasoning.
Body 3 (or Concession)	Counterargument: "Some may argue that [opposing view]..." → Concede what's valid → Rebut: "However, [your reasoning] because [evidence]." This paragraph often makes the difference between a 4 and a 6.
Conclusion	Do NOT just restate your thesis. Extend your argument: discuss broader implications, connect to a larger idea, or issue a call to action. End with something memorable.

11. PRECISE TONE WORDS (USE THESE, NOT "GOOD/BAD")

Positive: reverent, celebratory, earnest, laudatory, optimistic, impassioned, fervent, sanguine, whimsical, benevolent
Negative: sardonic, contemptuous, indignant, caustic, scathing, derisive, acerbic, vitriolic, disparaging, disdainful
Neutral/Measured: pragmatic, analytical, detached, objective, dispassionate, measured, clinical, matter-of-fact, didactic

Complex: ambivalent, resigned, wistful, bittersweet, melancholic, nostalgic, pensive, reflective, circumspect
Critical: skeptical, ironic, satirical, admonitory, reproachful, incredulous, wry, mocking, condescending
Urgent: imploring, exhortative, defiant, resolute, vehement, emphatic, insistent, commanding, galvanizing

Tone ≠ Topic. The topic might be sad, but the tone could be detached or analytical. Always separate what is being discussed from how the author discusses it.

12. RHETORICAL ANALYSIS COMMENTARY STARTERS

- "By employing [device], [author] effectively [verb: underscores, amplifies, challenges, dismantles] the notion that..."
- "This strategic use of [device] serves to [effect on audience], thereby advancing [author]'s broader argument that..."
- "The shift from [X] to [Y] reveals [author]'s intent to [purpose], signaling to the audience that..."
- "[Author]'s deliberate choice of [specific word/phrase] carries connotations of [meaning], which reinforces..."
- "Through the juxtaposition of [A] and [B], [author] exposes the tension between [concept] and [concept], compelling the reader to..."
- "The cumulative effect of [device pattern] throughout the passage creates a sense of [feeling/understanding] that..."

The Magic Formula: [Author] uses [specific device] + [quote/evidence] + to [what it does for the audience] + which [how it advances the overall argument]. This pattern earns Row B points consistently.

9. TRANSITION WORDS & PHRASES QUICK REFERENCE

FUNCTION	WORDS & PHRASES
Adding/Amplifying	furthermore, moreover, in addition, equally important, similarly, likewise, not only...but also
Contrasting	however, nevertheless, on the other hand, conversely, in contrast, whereas, although, despite, yet, notwithstanding
Cause/Effect	consequently, as a result, therefore, thus, hence, accordingly, this leads to, because of this
Concession	admittedly, granted, while it is true that, to be sure, of course, certainly, one might argue
Evidence Intro	for instance, as [Source X] illustrates, according to, as demonstrated by, evidenced by, specifically
Concluding	ultimately, in essence, fundamentally, taken together, the significance lies in, this reveals that
Sequencing	initially, subsequently, first...then, building on this, following this logic, the progression reveals

Pro Tip: Don't start every paragraph with a transition. Vary your sentence openings. The best essays use transitions *within* paragraphs to connect ideas smoothly, not just between paragraphs.

10. MULTIPLE-CHOICE STRATEGY

- **Read the questions first** (not answers) before reading the passage. This primes your brain to look for what matters.
- **Eliminate 2 answers immediately.** Most questions have 2 clearly wrong choices. Focus your analysis on the remaining 3.
- **"Best" means most complete.** Several answers may be partially correct. Choose the one that is most thorough and specific.
- **Watch for "EXCEPT" and "NOT" questions.** Circle these words. Students lose easy points by missing them.
- **For tone/purpose questions,** go back to the passage. Your memory of tone is less reliable than re-reading 2-3 key sentences.
- **Pace: ~12 minutes per passage.** If stuck on a question for 90+ seconds, mark it and move on. Come back with fresh eyes.
- **Wrong answers often use extreme language** ("always," "never," "completely") while correct answers use moderate language ("suggests," "primarily," "most likely").

13. LAST-MINUTE TIPS & TEST DAY STRATEGY

1. **Use the 15-minute reading period wisely.** Read all 3 FRQ prompts. Annotate the synthesis sources. Jot a quick thesis for each essay. Students who plan write faster and score higher.
2. **Start with your strongest essay.** You don't have to go in order (Q1, Q2, Q3). Start with the one you're most confident about to bank points and build momentum.
3. **Write legibly.** Readers can't score what they can't read. Print if your cursive is messy. Leave margins for edits. Skip lines between paragraphs.
4. **Quality over quantity.** A focused 4-paragraph essay beats a rambling 7-paragraph one. Every sentence should earn points.
5. **Embed quotes, don't drop them.** Wrong: "Freedom is never free." Right: The author's assertion that liberty demands sacrifice underscores her call to action.
6. **If running out of time on an essay,** write a strong concluding sentence that restates your thesis with a broader implication. A partial essay with a clear argument scores better than a complete essay with no point.
7. **On MCQs: answer every single question.** There is no guessing penalty. Eliminate what you can, then pick your best guess. Never leave a bubble blank.
8. **Don't waste time writing a long introduction.** Get to your thesis within 2-3 sentences. AP readers have seen millions of essays that start with "Since the beginning of time..." Don't be that student.
9. **Bring multiple pens** (black or dark blue ink). Pencil for MCQ (No. 2). A watch (non-digital, non-smart) to track time. Water. A snack for the break between sections.
10. **The night before: review this sheet, then sleep.** Cramping rhetorical terms at 2 AM won't help. A rested brain writes better essays. Trust your preparation.

14. IDEAL TIMING BREAKDOWN

TASK	TIME	NOTES
Section I: MCQ	60 min	~12 min per passage. Flag hard Qs, come back.
--- BREAK (usually 10 min) ---		
Reading Period	15 min	Read all 3 prompts. Annotate. Outline theses.
Essay 1 (your strongest)	40 min	5 min plan + 30 min write + 5 min proofread
Essay 2	40 min	5 min plan + 30 min write + 5 min proofread
Essay 3	40 min	5 min plan + 30 min write + 5 min proofread

Non-Negotiable: If you hit 40 minutes on an essay, write a conclusion and MOVE ON. Three finished essays always beat two great ones and a blank page.

15. DAY-OF REMINDERS

- Bring: No. 2 pencils, black/blue pens, a watch, photo ID, admission ticket, water, snack
- Don't bring: phone (leave in car), smartwatch, notes, highlighters
- Read every prompt twice before writing
- Circle task verbs: "analyze," "argue," "synthesize"
- Cross out wrong MCQ answers on the test booklet
- Budget 40 min max per essay—no exceptions
- Name one specific device per body paragraph minimum
- Always connect evidence back to your thesis
- Use formal academic tone (no "I think" or "in my opinion")
- End each essay—even if rushed, write a final sentence