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AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE · FREE RESOURCE

Every Past FRQ Prompt by Year

A year-by-year archive of AP Lang free-response topics: synthesis (2007–2026), rhetorical analysis passages (1981–2026), and argument prompts (1981–2026), followed by an analysis of themes, trends, and 20 practice topics modeled on recent prompts. Use it to choose practice prompts and to see what the exam keeps asking.

Read this first

What this archive is. The entries are paraphrased summaries of the topics and tasks. They are not reproductions of the prompts. For the actual wording, sources, and passages, use the places listed below.

A caution. Before 2019 the exam used a 9-point holistic rubric and different task wording (“defend, challenge, or qualify”; “analyze the rhetorical strategies”). Older prompts are excellent practice, but score them with the current 6-point rubric (see *The 6-Point Rubrics Decoded*). Entries marked “verify” below are not confirmed from a College Board document.

Part 1: Synthesis prompts, 2007–2026

Since 2007 Question 1 has been the synthesis essay: read the sources, then develop a position using at least three. Sources were seven or eight in some early years and six since 2012.

YEAR	TOPIC AND TASK	SOURCES
2007	Advertising: position on the effects of advertising	6
2007 Form B	Museum acquisitions: key considerations when a museum acquires an artifact or artwork	6
2008	The penny: should the U.S. eliminate it?	7
2008 Form B	National curriculum: should all high-school English students read specific required texts?	6
2009	Space exploration: issues to weigh in deciding about it	8

YEAR	TOPIC AND TASK	SOURCES
2009 Form B	Individuality vs. conformity in public schools: how far schools should support each	7
2010	Technology in schools: factors to weigh before adopting instructional technology	6
2010 Form B	Daylight saving time: evaluate and recommend whether to continue	6
2011	Locavores: key issues and implications of a community locavore movement	7
2011 Form B	Green living: extent to which government should foster green practices	6
2012	U.S. Postal Service: whether and how to restructure it for the 21st century	8
2013	Memorials and monuments: factors to consider when memorializing a person or event	7
2014	Value of a college education: is college worth its cost?	6
2015	Honor codes: should your school establish, keep, revise, or abolish one?	6
2016	English as a global language: are monolingual English speakers at a disadvantage?	6
2017	Public libraries: their future role	6
2018	Eminent domain: is it productive and beneficial?	6
2019	Wind farms: most important factors in deciding whether to build one	6
2020	No synthesis question (one 45-minute online rhetorical analysis exam)	none
2021	Handwriting instruction: the place of handwriting (cursive) in schools	6
2022 Set 1	STEM education initiatives: their value	6

YEAR	TOPIC AND TASK	SOURCES
2022 Set 2	Topic not confirmed from a College Board document; teacher compilations disagree (verify before use)	6
2023 Set 1	Urban rewilding: how worthwhile are rewilding initiatives for cities?	6
2023 Set 2	Vertical farms: their value for the future of agriculture	6
2024 Set 1	Historic preservation laws: the value, if any, of laws protecting historic buildings (included a <i>New Yorker</i> cartoon and a survey graph)	6
2024 Set 2	Food trucks: most important factors cities should consider when regulating mobile food vendors (included a Census graph and an editorial cartoon)	6
2025 Set 1	Space debris: most important factors for space agencies and nations (included an ESA graph and a Business Insider chart)	6
2025 Set 2	Mapping software and GPS: the value of real-time navigation apps (included an eMarketer graph and an app-usage chart)	6
2026	Napping: the value, if any, of napping (included a sleep-survey graph and a photograph)	6

How to practice with this. Pick a prompt from a year whose full packet you can get (2023–2026 from AP Central; earlier years from your teacher’s AP Classroom). Give yourself the full 15-minute reading period plus 40 minutes. If you cannot get the sources, use the topic as a thesis-only drill: write a defensible thesis and a three-claim line of reasoning in five minutes, then name which kinds of sources you would expect (a graph, a cartoon, an opinion piece) and which stance each might take.

Part 2: Rhetorical analysis passages, 1981–2026

Before 2007 the exam had no synthesis question and often included two analysis passages. Entries marked “B” are from alternate forms. Task focus is paraphrased.

1981–1999

YEAR	PASSAGE AND FOCUS
1981	"The Rattler" (effect on reader via organization, point of view, language); George Bernard Shaw's letter on his mother's cremation (attitude through diction and detail)
1982	Adlai Stevenson, "Cat Veto" letter (what makes the argument effective)
1983	Thomas Carlyle on work (attitude, persuasive language)
1984	A boxing-match passage (diction, syntax, imagery, tone)
1985	Two passages on the Soviet satellite launch (compare); revised paragraph drafts on war and language
1986	N. Scott Momaday and Dee Brown on landscape (differing purposes)
1987	Zora Neale Hurston on her childhood (diction, point of view)
1988	Frederick Douglass arriving in New York (figures of speech, syntax)
1989	Martin Luther King Jr., <i>Why We Can't Wait</i> (purpose and devices)
1990	A pilot's autobiography (style reveals personality); two 19th-century descriptions of the Galapagos (compare)
1991	Igor Stravinsky on orchestra conductors; Richard Rodriguez on family and self
1992	Elizabeth I's speech to the troops at Tilbury; Nancy Mairs, "On Being a Cripple"
1993	Austen (1813) and Dickens (1865) marriage proposals (compare); E. M. Forster, "My Wood"
1994	George Savile on Charles II; Joan Didion on the Santa Ana winds
1995	Ellen Goodman, "The Company Man"
1996	Lady Mary Wortley Montagu on women's education; Gary Soto, <i>A Summer Life</i>
1997	Meena Alexander on fractured identity; Douglass, <i>Narrative</i> , third paragraph
1998	Charles Lamb declining Wordsworth's invitation (tone); Coca-Cola vs. Grove Press letters (compare)

YEAR	PASSAGE AND FOCUS
1999	Two Okefenokee Swamp passages (style and purpose); Jamaica Kincaid on England

2000–2006

YEAR	PASSAGE AND FOCUS
2000	Eudora Welty, <i>One Writer's Beginnings</i> ; George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi"
2001	George Eliot letter on the development of a writer; Mary Oliver on owls
2002	Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address; Virginia Woolf, "Moments of Being"
2003	Alfred M. Green, 1861 speech urging African Americans to enlist; Audubon vs. Annie Dillard on flocks of birds (compare)
2004	Lord Chesterfield, letter to his son; Richard Rodriguez, <i>Days of Obligation</i>
2005	<i>The Onion</i> , mock press release for "MagnaSoles" (satire); Form B: Maria W. Stewart's 1832 lecture and Dave Barry on the Mississippi
2006	William Hazlitt, "On the Want of Money"; Jennifer Price, "The Plastic Pink Flamingo"; Form B: Shaw, <i>Saint Joan</i> , the Inquisitor's speech

2007–2019 (single question)

YEAR	AUTHOR	TEXT	TASK FOCUS
2007	Scott Russell Sanders	<i>Staying Put</i> (1993)	Strategies developing his perspective on moving
2007 B	Wendell Phillips	1861 speech praising Toussaint L'Ouverture	Strategies of praise
2008	John M. Barry	<i>The Great Influenza</i> (2004)	How he characterizes scientific research
2008 B	Leonid Fridman	"America Needs Its Nerds" (1990)	How he develops his argument
2009	Edward O. Wilson	<i>The Future of Life</i> (2002)	How satire shows unproductive environmental debate

YEAR	AUTHOR	TEXT	TASK FOCUS
2009 B	Walter Lippmann	"The Indispensable Opposition" (1939)	Strategies developing the argument
2010	Benjamin Banneker	1791 letter to Thomas Jefferson	Strategies arguing against slavery
2010 B	Debra Marquart	<i>The Horizontal World</i> (2006)	Characterizing the upper Midwest
2011	Florence Kelley	1905 speech to the National American Woman Suffrage Association	Conveying her message about child labor
2011 B	Samuel Johnson	1762 letter denying a request for patronage	How he crafts his denial
2012	John F. Kennedy	1962 news-conference remarks on steel price increases	Achieving his purpose
2013	Richard Louv	<i>Last Child in the Woods</i> (2008)	Argument about the separation of people and nature
2014	Abigail Adams	1780 letter to John Quincy Adams	Strategies advising her son
2015	Cesar Chavez	1978 article on the anniversary of King's assassination	Argument about nonviolent resistance
2016	Margaret Thatcher	2004 eulogy for Ronald Reagan	Conveying her message
2017	Clare Boothe Luce	1960 speech to the Women's National Press Club	How she prepares the audience for criticism of the press
2018	Madeleine Albright	1997 Mount Holyoke commencement speech	Conveying her message to graduates
2019	Mohandas Gandhi	1930 letter to Viceroy Lord Irwin	Presenting his case

2020–2026 (6-point rubric era)

YEAR	AUTHOR	TEXT	TASK FOCUS
2020	Multiple forms (online 45-minute exam); College Board did not publish the full set		

YEAR	AUTHOR	TEXT	TASK FOCUS
2021	Barack Obama	2013 remarks dedicating the Rosa Parks statue	Conveying his message about Parks's legacy
2022 Set 1	Sonia Sotomayor	2001 Berkeley lecture, "A Latina Judge's Voice"	Conveying her message about identity and judging
2022 Set 2	Lady Bird Johnson (reported by teacher compilations; verify)	1964 speech at the Eleanor Roosevelt Memorial Foundation luncheon	Paying tribute to Roosevelt
2023 Set 1	Rita Dove	2016 University of Virginia commencement address	Conveying her wishes for graduates
2023 Set 2	Michelle Obama	2017 final speech as First Lady	Conveying her message to young people
2024 Set 1	Reshma Saujani	Essay in <i>American Like Me</i> (2018)	Conveying her message about the nature of bravery
2024 Set 2	Simu Liu	Memoir <i>We Were Dreamers</i> (2022)	Conveying the experience of emigrating as a child
2025 Set 1	David Treuer	Introduction to <i>Rez Life</i> (2012)	Developing his argument about Native American contributions
2025 Set 2	Raquel Vasquez Gilliland	2023 <i>New York Times</i> op-ed on nature	Developing her argument about going outside
2026	Laura Amy Schlitz	2008 Newbery Medal acceptance speech	Communicating what it is to be a writer

How to practice with this. For public-domain or widely reprinted speeches and letters (Lincoln, Banneker, Douglass, Gandhi, Kelley, Chesterfield, Johnson), find the text through the American Rhetoric Speech Bank or Project Gutenberg. Write your own orienting paragraph (speaker, date, occasion, audience), then write a 40-minute essay. Compare it to the official sample responses for 2023–2025 on AP Central. For the pre-2019 prompts, focus on the passage rather than the original task wording, which asked about "strategies" rather than "choices."

Part 3: Argument prompts, 1981–2026

1981–1999

- **1981** Thomas Szasz on the struggle for definition
- **1982** A reading on happiness (agree or disagree); describe a place
- **1983** "Language inflation"
- **1984** How you track time; Shelley vs. Milton on freedom
- **1985** The state of U.S. television
- **1986** Paired-word distinctions; human nature's desire for patterns

- **1987** E. M. Forster on personal relations vs. causes; the language of a specific group
- **1988** Tocqueville on democracy and individualism; a magazine article on a familiar place
- **1989** Church-bulletin criticism
- **1990** One person at two times
- **1991** Ecclesiastes on wisdom and grief
- **1992** Joseph Addison on ridicule
- **1993** H. L. Mencken on the artist and society
- **1994** Barbara Tuchman on “wooden-headedness”
- **1995** John Ruskin on the soldier and the merchant; James Baldwin on language and identity
- **1996** Lewis Lapham on American faith in money
- **1997** Neil Postman on Huxley vs. Orwell
- **1998** Madame Merle vs. Isabel Archer on the self (*The Portrait of a Lady*)
- **1999** “The only crime is pride” (*Antigone*)

2000–2026

YEAR	STIMULUS	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
2000	<i>King Lear</i> on wealth, sin, and justice	Paraphrase and assess
2001	Susan Sontag on photography limiting understanding	Support, refute, or qualify
2002	Milan Kundera, <i>Testaments Betrayed</i> (privacy)	Support, refute, or qualify
2003	Neal Gabler on entertainment’s effect on society	Defend, challenge, or qualify
2004	A controversial issue of your choice	Weigh both sides and propose a compromise
2005	Peter Singer on donating surplus wealth	Evaluate the argument
2005 B	A Lewis Thomas claim	Defend, challenge, or qualify
2006	Public-opinion polls and statements in the media	Position on their value
2006 B	An Arthur Schopenhauer claim	Defend, challenge, or qualify
2007	Incentives for charitable acts	Ethics of rewarding charity
2007 B	Jessica Mitford on muckraking journalists	Do they go too far?
2008	Corporate sponsorship in schools	Weigh pros and cons; position
2008 B	Daniel Boorstin on dissent vs. disagreement	Defend, challenge, or qualify

YEAR	STIMULUS	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
2009	Horace on adversity eliciting talent	Role of adversity in character
2009 B	Barbara Ehrenreich on 1980s television	Defend, challenge, or qualify
2010	Alain de Botton on humorists	Defend, challenge, or qualify their vital role
2010 B	An annual “Buy Nothing Day”	Position on establishing one
2011	Thomas Paine, <i>Rights of Man</i> (1791), on America	Extent to which the characterization holds today
2011 B	H. L. Mencken: the average man prefers safety to freedom	Validity in contemporary society
2012	William Lyon Phelps vs. Bertrand Russell on certainty and doubt	Relationship between certainty and doubt
2013	Plato, Aristotle, Sartre on ownership	Relationship between ownership and sense of self
2014	Bronson and Merryman, “The Creativity Crisis”	Letter to a school board for or against a creativity class
2015	An anthropologist on “How are you?” as politeness	Value of polite speech in a community
2016	Oscar Wilde (1891): disobedience as humanity’s original virtue	Extent to which valid
2017	Chris Hedges, <i>Empire of Illusion</i> , on artifice in politics and consumer culture	Position on the claim
2018	Anne Morrow Lindbergh, <i>Gift from the Sea</i> : choosing the unknown	Position on the value of exploring the unknown
2019	“Overrated” (Queen Rania, Anthony Burgess)	Choose something overrated and argue the judgment
2020	No argument question	
2021	The pursuit of perfection	Position on the value of striving for perfection
2022 Set 1	Colin Powell, <i>It Worked for Me</i> , on timing of decisions	Extent to which valid
2022 Set 2	Not confirmed from a College Board document (verify)	
2023 Set 1	Maxine Hong Kingston (2016): individual voices vs. a community of voices	Extent to which valid

YEAR	STIMULUS	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
2023 Set 2	Carlos Curbelo (2018): scaring people into agreement sows resentment	Extent to which valid
2024 Set 1	J Wortham (<i>New York Times</i> , 2013): selfies as “a kind of visual diary”	Extent to which valid
2024 Set 2	Jimmy Santiago Baca (2019): talking about a new car vs. a family story	Extent to which valid
2025 Set 1	Naomi Osaka (<i>People</i> , 2022): “try to be present in each moment”	Extent to which valid
2025 Set 2	Amanda Gorman (<i>Time</i> , 2021): optimism “in conversation with” pessimism	Extent to which valid
2026	Mae Jemison (2009): “Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations”	Extent to which valid

How to practice with this. Argument is the easiest question to practice without the original packet, because the stimulus is only a few sentences. For any prompt above, write the claim in your own words, spend five minutes defining the key term and drafting a thesis, and list three pieces of evidence from different areas (history, literature, current events, personal observation). Then write the essay in 40 minutes.

Part 4: Analysis

Recurring themes

Synthesis. Almost every topic falls into one of four families:

FAMILY	EXAMPLES
Civic and institutional policy	The penny, the Postal Service, eminent domain, historic preservation, food-truck regulation
Education	Technology, honor codes, handwriting, STEM programs, college cost
Environment and technology	Wind farms, rewilding, vertical farms, space debris, GPS
Culture and everyday life	Advertising, monuments, libraries, museums, napping

Every topic is low-stakes enough for a 17-year-old to argue without specialized knowledge, and it is framed so that reasonable people disagree. Two task shapes recur: **value** (“the value, if any, of...”) and **factors** (“the most important factors to consider when...”).

Rhetorical analysis. Passages come in three groups: ceremonial (commencements, eulogies, tributes, award acceptances), persuasive-civic (Kelley, Banneker, Gandhi, Kennedy), and reflective memoir or op-ed (Louv, Saujani, Liu, Treuer, Vasquez Gilliland). The prompt always supplies the message or purpose, so your job is to

explain *how* the choices build it.

Argument. Topics are abstract, value-laden concepts a teenager can discuss: adversity, humor, certainty, ownership, politeness, disobedience, perfection, optimism, being present, others' limited imaginations.

How the prompts have evolved

1. **From many passages to one.** In the 1980s and 1990s the exam often had two analysis passages and no synthesis. The synthesis question arrived in 2007 and became a fixed part of the exam.
2. **From "defend, challenge, or qualify" to "extent to which."** Since 2019 the argument task is nearly uniform: argue your position on the extent to which a named person's claim is valid.
3. **From "strategies" to "choices."** The rhetorical analysis task was reworded in 2019 to "rhetorical choices," matching the rubric's emphasis on describing what a writer did, not just labeling devices.
4. **From obscure to contemporary.** Early passages leaned on 18th and 19th century prose and literary essays. Since about 2010, passages and argument stimuli are overwhelmingly speeches, op-eds, and memoir from diverse contemporary figures.
5. **Visuals and data.** Every synthesis set since 2012 has included at least one visual and one quantitative source.
6. **A shorter, more focused rubric.** The 9-point holistic scale gave way to a 6-point analytic rubric in 2019, so scores now reflect separate judgments of thesis, evidence and commentary, and sophistication.
7. **Two forms a year.** Since 2021 College Board has released two complete FRQ sets annually.

Twenty "most likely" practice topics

These are modeled on the patterns above; they are not predictions of any actual exam. For each, write a synthesis-style position, a rhetorical-analysis lens, or an argument essay as noted.

Synthesis-style topics (value or factors): 1. The value of school start times later in the morning 2. Factors a city should consider before installing public bike-share systems 3. The value, if any, of school uniforms 4. Factors to weigh before a town adopts a four-day school week 5. The value of public art in neighborhoods 6. Factors a library should consider when replacing print collections with digital ones 7. The value, if any, of community gardens in cities 8. Factors a government should consider when regulating ride-sharing or e-scooters

Argument-style prompts (modeled on "the extent to which the claim is valid"): 9. The extent to which "Failure is the best teacher" is valid 10. The extent to which "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication" is valid 11. The extent to which "A leader's first duty is to listen" is valid 12. The extent to which "Curiosity matters more than intelligence" is valid 13. The extent to which "Boredom is the mother of invention" is valid 14. The extent to which "Tradition holds a community together" is valid 15. The extent to which "We remember what we choose to forget" is valid (memory and choice)

Rhetorical-analysis scenarios (find a real text and analyze): 16. A commencement address by a scientist or artist 17. A eulogy for a public figure 18. An open letter to a government body or institution 19. An op-ed on a local issue arguing for a civic change 20. An award acceptance speech by a writer or athlete

How to use these twenty

Alternate question types across a week. After each timed essay, score it with the rubric, then write one sentence naming the single change that would most raise Row B. Over ten weeks, that is ten specific edits, which is more useful than ten more essays written the same way.

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