

# CHAPTER

# 7

## Prewriting and Planning

### IN THIS CHAPTER

**Summary:** Practice with the preliminary steps in the development of your AP English essay

#### KEY IDEA

#### Key Ideas

- ✦ Generate the raw material of your essay
- ✦ Notate related texts
- ✦ Deconstruct accompanying texts on which the AP English Language and Literature prompts are based

*"A good essay is like a sharpened pencil. It has a point."  
(A.A.)*

You can sharpen that pencil using a mechanical or electric sharpener or just a plain, old penknife. (By the way, the word *penknife* got its name from the small knife that was used to sharpen the ends of quills that would be used as pens.)

Just as a sharpened point of a pencil will produce a fine, clear line, your sharpened writing skills will allow you to present your ideas in a clear and compelling AP English essay. This chapter will provide you with information and practice exercises that will both develop and strengthen your prewriting and planning skills. As your writing trainers, we lead you through the actual process of reading, notating, and organizing your thoughts and materials for an AP English essay.

### Prewriting

#### STRATEGY

**Prewriting is the process that generates the raw material on which you will base your essay.** It can be a messy piece of business, but this messiness can lead to a well-developed

and appealingly designed presentation. From your many years of experience as an English student, you are probably familiar with the prewriting process. This includes:

**General Annotating:** (See sample prompts and texts)

- Highlighting
- Underlining
- Bracketing

**Within the prompt:** (See sample prompts)

- Determining the subject
- Deciding on a strategy

**Within the text and outside of text:** (See sample texts)

- Writing margin notes: Jot down questions, responses, identifications, etc., in the margins.
- Concept Mapping and Concept Wheels Group related ideas, examples, points, etc., around a major point. Use circles, squares, and lines to connect specifics to the topic or major point.
- Charting List ideas, examples, etc., under major headings.
- Questioning Identify who, what, when, where, why, and how. This technique works quite well for informative and explanatory essays.
- Free Writing For a set period of time (such as 5-10 minutes), jot down anything about your subject that comes to mind. The important thing is not to stop for the entire time period. This is a good mind-juggling technique for those essay assignments that do not involve timed writing. It's not particularly useful for an essay exam situation.
- Brainstorming This is a good group pre-writing activity in which the people in the group try to come up with as many possible words or phrases or ideas that can be associated with a given subject. It is not really practical for a timed essay. (Yes, you can brainstorm by yourself.)

## Notating the Text



After deconstructing the prompt, the next step is to notate the text, using any of the above techniques that are appropriate and comfortable for you. The notating process demands your active involvement with the text. You need to:

1. Quickly read to get the gist of the text.

Completing items 2 through 5 should not take any longer than 2–3 minutes.



2. Take a moment to clarify your take on the text (your response to subject, tone, style, etc.).
3. Check the title, etc., for any useable peripheral information.
4. Jot down any general thoughts and observations in the top margin area.
5. Go back to the prompt and choose those elements with which you are comfortable and that seem appropriate for the required task.
6. Then, go back to the text for a truly close second reading.

Carefully completing item 7 will point you in the direction of the development of your essay.

7. Notate those elements, details, examples, etc., that illustrate the devices, techniques, and ideas on which you've chosen to focus.

With the notated text in front of you, planning the organization of your essay will prove to be a quick and easy task as you complete items 8 through 10.

8. Categorize your notes. This simply means deciding which information you will link to each of the major elements that you're developing.
9. Develop the sequence in which you will present each element or major point.
10. Decide on which examples, details, etc., you will use to develop each element or major idea and in what order you will place specifics.
11. Last, decide on which rhetorical strategy will be your controlling organizational pattern.

After all of these preliminary steps have been completed, the writer should find it fairly easy to construct a clear and workable thesis statement.

With the prewriting and basic planning completed, you've

- decided what you are going to write about;
- thought about the elements of the prompt you will deal with;
- thought about the purpose of the essay;
- made a decision about the tone you will take.

You're now in a position to construct a thesis statement that makes the reader aware of the writer's assertion and purpose. **In other words, the thesis statement will clearly indicate the subject and controlling idea of the essay.** It should also give the reader some idea as to the pattern of development (rhetorical strategy) and the direction the essay will take in relation to the subject and controlling idea. Here are a few examples of good thesis statements created by AP English students:

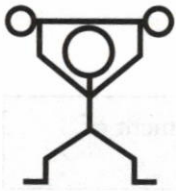
- Goodwin and Dickens create two images of the famous London fog [**subject**] that are at radically opposite ends of the "fog spectrum." [**controlling idea**]
- In Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, the heroine, Celie, [**subject**] grows and develops tremendously as an individual as she undergoes major spiritual and psychological transformations. [**controlling idea**]
- Attempting to convince the white man to deal fairly with native Americans, [**subject**] Chief Seattle appeals to the pride and reason of Governor Isaac I. Stevens in a speech that reminds the Governor that, though weak, native Americans are not powerless. [**controlling idea**]



KEY IDEA

**Workout: Self-Control Exercise for Your Own Thesis Statement**

1. Locate at least three of your own AP English essays and write down the thesis statement for each.



A. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Underline the subject of each thesis statement.
3. Bracket the controlling idea of each thesis statement.
4. Is the subject clear in each statement? \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ no
5. Is the controlling idea clear in each statement? \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ no
6. If you answered “no” to either number 4 or 5, or both, you need to revise. Don’t neglect this or pooh-pooh it. Revision practice can only help your thesis writing skills improve.

**Two Sample Texts**

Read and think with us as we work our way through this sample text. Pay attention to the notes in the margins and the words, phrases, and sentences in the text that are bracketed. After notating the text, we manipulate these notes into statements about the text, and based on these notes and statements, we write the thesis statement.

**AP English Language Sample****A Presidential Candidate**

by Mark Twain

as it appeared in *The New York Evening Post* (June 9, 1879)

I have pretty much made up my mind to run for President. What the country wants is a candidate who cannot be injured by investigation of his past history, so that the enemies of the party will be unable to rake up anything against him that nobody ever heard of before. If you know the worst about a candidate, to begin with, every attempt to spring things on



him will be checkmated. Now I am going to enter the field with an open record. I am going to own up in advance to all the wickedness I have done, and if any Congressional committee is disposed to prow around my biography in the hope of discovering any dark and deadly deed that I have secreted, why—let it prow.

In the first place, I admit that I treed a rheumatic grandfather of mine in the winter of 1850. He was old and inexpert in climbing trees, but with the heartless brutality that is characteristic of me I ran him out of the front door in his nightshirt at the point of a shotgun, and caused him to bowl up a maple tree, where he remained all night, while I emptied shot into his legs. I did this because he snored. I will do it again if I ever have another grandfather. I am as inhuman now as I was in 1850. I candidly acknowledge that I ran away at the battle of Gettysburg. My friends have tried to smooth over this fact by asserting that I did so for the purpose of imitating Washington, who went into the woods at Valley Forge for the purpose of saying his prayers. It was a miserable subterfuge. I struck out in a straight line for the Tropic of Cancer because I was scared. I wanted my country saved, but I preferred to have somebody else save it. I entertain that preference yet. If the bubble reputation can be obtained only at the cannon's mouth, I am willing to go there for it, provided the cannon is empty. If it is loaded my immortal and inflexible purpose is to get over the fence and go home. My invariable practice in war has been to bring out of every fight two-thirds more men than when I went in. This seems to me to be Napoleonic in its grandeur.

My financial views are of the most decided character, but they are not likely, perhaps, to increase my popularity with the advocates of inflation. I do not insist upon the special supremacy of rag money or hard money. The great fundamental principle of my life is to take any kind I can get.

The rumor that I buried a dead aunt under my grapevine was correct. The vine needed fertilizing, my aunt had to be buried, and I dedicated her to this high purpose. Does that unfit me for the Presidency? The Constitution of our country does not say so. No other citizen was ever considered unworthy of this office because he enriched his grapevines with his dead relatives. Why should I be selected as the first victim of an absurd prejudice?

I admit also that I am not a friend of the poor man. I regard the poor man, in his present condition, as so much wasted raw material. Cut up and properly canned, he might be made useful to fatten the natives of the cannibal islands and to improve our export trade with that region. I shall recommend legislation upon the subject in my first message. My campaign cry will be: "Desiccate the poor workingman; stuff him into sausages."

These are about the worst parts of my record. On them I come before the country. If my country don't want me, I will go back again. But I recommend myself as a safe man—a man who starts from the basis of total depravity and proposes to be fiendish to the last.

## A Deconstruction of the AP English Language Sample

### A Presidential Candidate

by Mark Twain

as it appeared in *The New York Evening Post* (June 9, 1879)

parody  
regional

I have pretty much made up my mind to run for President. What the country wants is a  
candidate who cannot be injured by investigation of his past history, so that the enemies of  
the party will be unable to rake up anything against him that nobody ever heard of before. If

non-  
humorous  
honest

<b>will tell his sins</b>	you know the worst about a candidate, to begin with, every attempt to spring things on him will be checkmated. Now I am going to enter the field with an open record. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">I am going to own up in advance to all the wickedness I have done,</span> and if any Congressional committee is disposed to <u>prowl around</u> my biography in the hope of discovering any dark and deadly deed that I have secreted, why—let it <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">prowl.</span>	<b>regional regional family tale</b>
<b>experiences</b>	In the first place, I admit that <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">I treed a rheumatic grandfather of mine in the winter of 1850.</span> He was old and inexpert in climbing trees, but with the heartless brutality that is characteristic of me I ran him out of the front door in his nightshirt at the point of a shotgun, and caused him to bowl up a maple tree, where he remained all night, while I emptied shot into his legs. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">I did this because he snored.</span> I will do it again if I ever have another grandfather. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">I am as inhuman now as I was in 1850.</span> I candidly acknowledge that <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">I ran away at the battle of Gettysburg.</span> My friends have tried to smooth over this fact by asserting that I did so <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">for the purpose of imitating Washington,</span> who went into the woods at Valley Forge for the purpose of saying his prayers. It was a miserable subterfuge. I struck out in a straight line for the Tropic of Cancer <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">because I was scared.</span> I wanted my country saved, but I preferred to have somebody else save it. I entertain that preference yet. If the bubble reputation can be obtained only at the cannon's mouth, I am willing to go there for it, provided the cannon is empty. If it is loaded my immortal and inflexible purpose is to get over the fence and go home. My invariable practice in war has been to bring out of every fight two-thirds more men than when I went in. This seems to me to be Napoleonic in its grandeur.	<b>war experience</b>
<b>exaggeration and irony</b>		<b>war tale</b>
<b>exaggeration economic view</b>	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">My financial views</span> are of the most decided character, but they are not likely, perhaps, to increase my popularity with the advocates of inflation. I do not insist upon the special supremacy of rag money or hard money. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">The great fundamental principle of my life is to take any kind I can get.</span>	<b>opinion</b>
<b>2nd family tale irony and sarcasm</b>	The <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">rumor that I buried a dead aunt under my grapevine was correct.</span> The vine needed fertilizing, my aunt had to be buried, and I dedicated her to this high purpose. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Does that unfit me for the Presidency?</span> The Constitution of our country does not say so. No other citizen was ever considered unworthy of this office because he enriched his grapevines with his dead relatives. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Why should I be selected as the first victim of an absurd prejudice?</span>	<b>war tale rhetorical</b>
<b>questions opinion opinion re: the common man opposite views</b>	I admit also that <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">I am not a friend of the poor man.</span> I regard the poor man, in his present condition, as so much wasted raw material. Cut up and properly canned, he might be made useful to fatten the natives of the cannibal islands and to improve our export trade with that region. I shall recommend legislation upon the subject in my first message. My campaign cry will be: "Desiccate the poor workingman; stuff him into sausages."	<b>opinion</b>
		<b>allusion to "A Modest Proposal"</b>



**informal** These are about the worst parts of my record, On them I come before the country. If **total opposite of how politicians end their speeches** my country don't want me, I will go back again. But I recommend myself as a safe man—a man who starts from the basis of total depravity and proposes to be fiendish to the last.

Using the notes, the writer can easily complete each of the following planning points.

1. The purpose of "A Presidential Candidate" is to parody campaign speeches.
2. The tone/attitude of the selection is sarcastic, ironic, humorous.
3. The rhetorical devices used to develop the purpose and attitude include:

DEVICE	LOCATION
1. exaggeration	1. ¶2-grandfather, ¶4-aunt, ¶5-the poor
2. irony	2. ¶2-war exp., ¶3-finance, ¶4-burial
3. choice of details	3. (see irony) ¶2-Washington, ¶4-Constitution, ¶5-allusion
4. informal diction	4. ¶1-"pretty much own up . . ." ¶1-"prowl around," ¶2-"bowl up," ¶6-". . . don't want me"
5. rhetorical questions	5. ¶2 (2 examples)

3. "A Presidential Candidate" resembles a typical speech made by a political candidate today in several ways: (1) references to personal and moral standing, (2) family background, (3) position on the economy, (4) position on the common man, and (5) war experiences and patriotism.
4. "A Presidential Candidate" does NOT resemble a typical speech made by a political candidate today in several ways. First, rather than emphasizing the "good," he's done, Twain focuses on the "wrongs" he's committed. Second, he takes the absurdly opposite positions on the usual political issues. Third, rather than lofty language, his diction is informal and folksy.

Using the above information, the writer is in a position to write a clear **thesis statement**.

*In "A Presidential Candidate," Mark Twain makes his own "modest proposal"*  
**[subject]** *with a parody of the typical political campaign speech.* **[controlling idea]**

## AP English Literature Sample

As we did with the previous sample, read and think with us as we work our way through this sample poem. Pay attention to the notes in the margins and the words, phrases and lines that are bracketed. After notating the text, we manipulate these notes into statements about the poem, and based on these notes and statements, we write the thesis statement.

### Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold (1867)

The sea is calm tonight,  
 The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
 Upon the straits; on the French coast the light  
 Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,  
 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.  
 Come to the window, sweet is the night air!  
 Only, from the long line of spray

Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,  
 Listen! you hear the grating roar  
 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling, 10  
 At their return, up the high strand,  
 Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
 With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
 The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago 15  
 Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought  
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow  
 Of human misery; we  
 Find also in the sound a thought,  
 Hearing it by this distant northern sea. 20

The Sea of Faith  
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
 But now I only hear  
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, 25  
 Retreating, to the breath  
 Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear  
 And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true  
 To one another! for the world, which seems 30  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
 And we are here as on a darkling plain 35  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

### A Deconstruction of the AP English Literature Sample

#### Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold (1867)

<b>Positive</b>	The <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">sea</span> is calm <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">to-night</span> ,	<b>Positive</b>	<b>night = moon/fair/light/gleams/glimmering</b>
Sea = calm/full/ tranquil	The <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">tide is full</span> , the <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">moon lies fair</span>		
	Upon the straits; on the French coast the <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">light</span>		
	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Gleams</span> and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,		
	<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Glimmering</span> and vast, out in the <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">tranquil bay</span> .		5
<b>Look!---</b>	Come to the window, <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">sweet is the night air!</span>	<b>sweet-night</b>	
<b>senses</b>	Only, from the long line of spray		
	Where the <u>sea meets the moon-blanch'd land</u> ,	<b>contrast--sea &amp; land</b>	



**Listen---** Listen! you hear the grating roar **onomatopoeia**  
 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling, 10  
 At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin, **caesuras & enjambment**  
**Meter is slow** With tremulous cadence slow, and bring **for contrast**  
 The eternal note of sadness in. **go/stop/go pattern**

**why?---** Sophocles long ago 15  
 Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought----- **allusion**  
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow **contrast**  
**what sadness?** Of human misery; we  
 Find also in the sound a thought,  
Hearing it by this distant northern sea. 20

**Negative** The Sea of Faith **Negative**  
**Sea = turbid/distant/** Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore **night = drear/naked**  
**misery/north** Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
But now I only hear  
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, **assonance-sound/**  
Retreating, to the breath **slow** 25  
 Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear  
 And naked shingles\* of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true ----- **\*\* theme—his plea\*\***  
To one another! for the world, which seems **not real—dreams** 30  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
**repetition and contrast**  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
**positive to negative**  
**Simile in last 3 lines** And we are here as on a darkling plain 35  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night. **contrast—sea to**  
**land starts and ends**  
**with night/no light**

\*shingles = beaches

Using the notes written in the margins of the poem, the writer easily constructs the following mapping/chart.

**CONTRASTS**

	<b>Sea</b>	/	<b>Land</b>	(Diction and Imagery)
<i>stanza 1</i>	{		calm	confused
			light	darkling
			tranquil	struggle & clash
			}	<i>stanza 4</i>

*stanza 2* { Sophocles/Aegean long ago / Lovers / Northern sea now

<u>Sea</u>	of	<u>Faith</u>	
↓		↓	
once		now	}
↓		↓	
full, bright		melancholy, drear	
			<i>stanza 3</i>

<u>Land, of dreams</u>	/	<u>Land of reality</u>	}	<i>stanza 4, repetition</i>
so various		neither joy		
so beautiful		nor love		
so new		nor light		
		nor certitude		
		nor peace		
		nor help for pain		

**DEVICES / TECHNIQUES**

- Caesura—lines 9–12—all of stanzas 1 and 4
  - Begin/cease/begin (contrast)
  - go/stop/go = the waves
- Enjambment—lines 15–20—longer cadence = thoughts
- Metaphor—lines 20–27—Sea of Faith = disillusionment
- Simile—lines 29–36—like a land of dreams + as on a darkling plain (contrast)

**THEMES**

Life is a battle. Life is ebb and flow. Life is universal.	}	Only love is constantly in contrast to war/misery/darkness
--	---	--



## OBSERVATIONS

Moves from positive to negative  
 Moves from specific to universal to specific  
 Moves from light to dark  
 Moves from look to listen  
 ebb & flow of sea = ebb/flow of their love

climax = lines 27–28: his appeal that love is the only contrast to misery and pain.  
 love and loving are the only certainties in life.

Using the above information, the writer is in a position to write a clear **thesis statement**.

*Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is a study in contrasts [subject] developed to convince his beloved of the value of love and loyalty. [controlling idea]*

### A Note About Note-Taking Styles

You have no doubt noticed that the notation, prewriting, and planning styles of the two samples above are quite different. (At least, we hope you've noticed.) This was done purposely to illustrate the very important point that **there is no single, correct way to read, notate, prewrite, and plan any essay**. The important factor here is that you do the close reading, etc., and that you do it using strategies and techniques that are comfortable for you. As the old Nike ad said, "Just do it!"

With the prewriting and planning completed, you're ready to write your essay.

