AP English Literature and Composition

Revision Sheet · 考前速记

Learn these by heart before the exam. 考试前把这些内容背熟。

Character

Characters are built from what they say, do, think, and what others say about them. Read the details, then infer the trait; never assert a trait first.

Round versus flat 圆形人物与扁平人物: round characters carry contradiction and can change; flat ones serve a single function in the plot

Foil 陪衬人物: a character whose contrast reveals something about another; the contrast is the point, not the character

A character who CHANGES matters at the moment of change. Locate the turn and explain what caused it.

Inconsistency is not a flaw in the writing - it is characterisation. Explain what the contradiction reveals.

Motivation 动机: what the character wants and why; conflict is what stands between the want and the getting

Setting and Structure

Setting is time, place and social context. Ask what it makes possible, what it forbids, and what it says about the characters trapped in it.

Atmosphere 氛围: the feeling a setting creates in the reader, built from concrete sensory detail

Plot is the ORDER of events, not the events. Flashback, foreshadowing, in medias res and non-linear order are choices with effects.

Structure 结构: how a text is arranged - stanzas, acts, chapters, shifts; a shift in structure marks a shift in meaning

Look for contrasts, juxtapositions and reversals. A text's meaning usually sits at the point where two things are set against each other.

Conflict: character against character, self, society, nature or fate. Resolution reveals the text's values.

Poetic structure: sonnet (often a turn or volta before the close), villanelle, free verse, blank verse, enjambment versus end-stopping, caesura.

Narration and Point of View

Narrator versus speaker 叙述者与说话者: the voice telling the story or poem; never assume it is the author

Points of view: first person (limited by that mind), third-person limited, third-person omniscient, and the rarer second person.

Unreliable narrator 不可靠叙述者: one whose account the reader has reason to doubt; the gap between what is said and what is true carries the meaning

Narrative distance: how close the telling stands to a character's thoughts. Free indirect discourse blurs narrator and character deliberately.

Dramatic irony 戏剧性反讽: the reader knows what a character does not; the tension between the two is the effect

Perspective is the narrator's bias and blind spots. Identify what this narrator CANNOT see; that is usually the point.

Figurative Language and Sound

Simile and metaphor both compare; the question is always what the comparison lets the writer claim. Extended metaphor and conceit run one comparison through a passage.

Personification 拟人: giving human qualities to a non-human thing, often to make an abstraction act on the characters

Imagery is sensory detail - visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory. Group the images; a pattern is an argument.

Symbol 象征: a concrete thing standing for an abstract idea; earn it from repetition in the text, do not import it

Irony: verbal (says one thing, means another), situational (outcome defies expectation), dramatic (reader knows more). Satire uses irony to criticise.

Sound: alliteration, assonance, consonance, sibilance, onomatopoeia, rhyme scheme, meter (iambic pentameter is the default English line).

Diction and syntax carry tone. A shift in either - especially at a stanza break or a dash - is a tonal shift worth analysing.

Allusion borrows authority or irony from another text. Ambiguity and paradox hold two meanings at once and are usually deliberate.

Argument and Commentary

Literary thesis 文学论点: a defensible interpretive claim about how the text creates meaning; not a summary, not an observation about a device

Weak: 'the poet uses metaphor.' Strong: 'the poem's water metaphors turn grief from something suffered into something navigated.'

Every body paragraph: claim, then textual evidence

(quoted briefly and accurately), then commentary explaining how the evidence proves the claim.

Quote short and embed the quotation in your own sentence. Long block quotations displace the commentary that scores.

Interpretations must be grounded in the text. A reading nothing in the text supports scores nothing, however clever.

Complexity earns credit: name a tension the text will not resolve, note where your own reading meets resistance, or place the text in a wider conversation.

Exam technique

Three free-response tasks: poetry analysis, prose fiction analysis, and a literary argument on a work you choose.

For the chosen-work essay, pick a novel or play you know in detail. Specific scenes and characters beat a famous title you half-remember.

Read the prompt twice and underline what it asks you to analyse. Answering a related-but-different question is the most common way to lose marks.

Annotate before writing: mark shifts, contrasts, repeated images, and the ending. The last lines usually redirect the whole text.

Do not paraphrase the passage. Assume your reader has read it; your job is to explain how it means, not what it says.

In multiple choice, prefer the answer that the text can support in full. An answer that is half right is wrong.

Use present tense for the text's events, and name the writer, not just 'the author'.