

Seventh Grade Pre-AP Overview

Seventh grade Pre-AP students have experienced a whole year of literature and language studies and should now be ready to advance further into the world of textual analysis, writing and language study. In sixth grade, the students became familiar with words like “diction,” “imagery,” “detail,” “tone,” and “irony.” Having heard these words before and having been introduced to close reading last year will ease considerably their transition into a more advanced study of literature, language, and writing. However, they are not ready for giant steps yet. Seventh grade students still need to have concepts and skills explained and practiced one by one, in small increments.

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- *They should strengthen their close reading skills* with continuous practice and lots of advice from their teachers.
- *They should develop into avid readers* who are comfortable reading quickly, who retain what they read, who understand how to figure out what words mean from their contexts, and who receive images when they read.
- *They should hone their writing skills* by the daily practice of writing—either spontaneous (journals or short essays), timed (in class) or out of class essays that involve several drafts and plenty of revision.
- *They should begin to develop a voice and style of their own* by choosing words precisely, using images effectively, and selecting rich details that add complexity and depth to their writing.
- *They should experiment with sentence structure* by imitating the way that professional writers craft sentences.
- *They should sharpen their interpretive skills* with discussions and activities that allow them to predict, infer, apply, synthesize, generalize, and evaluate.
- *They should practice their analytical skills* in order to become accustomed to the habit of breaking a text or an idea into its parts, examining the parts closely, and searching the text for connections to their own world and their own lives.
- *These students are also ready to build upon their knowledge of grammar*—to begin to use the resources of the vast toolbox of the English language.
 - Having mastered prepositional phrases and infinitive phrases last year, they are now prepared to tackle appositives.
 - Having begun to use independent and dependent clauses in sixth grade, they are now ready to begin to write cumulative sentences and to experiment with different kinds of sentence forms.
 - And so much more...

Consider Pre-AP English the next step to success— success in the adventure that is the study of English. Pre-AP offers a magnificent challenge to seventh graders and their teachers, as well. One step at a time and walking together, the journey will be a fruitful one, one that opens the doors to the beauty and power of literature, and majesty of language, and the glory of a job well done at journey's end. Pre-AP English can be the pathway to new worlds of fantasy, romance, fact, poetry, tragedy, farce, comedy—the landscape of the imagination.

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Pre-AP English is a skills-based program that has no set curriculum. Its rigor and depth is

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based on the premise that most seventh graders, presented with the opportunity to learn a valuable set of skills and to immerse themselves in a sea of interesting books, active learning, and “big ideas,” will welcome the challenge of the class and commit to a “can-do” attitude. The momentum that began in sixth grade Pre-AP will propel these students forward, fueling their drive to become skilled users and interpreters of the English language and its literature.

Teaching AP skills to young students does not require a restructuring of guides and materials. Anthologies already in place can be the bedrock of the student's study of literature. Age-appropriate texts are the key to student success. It is not necessary for a school district to go to great expense to begin and maintain a Pre-AP program; all it takes is dedication by teachers to “raise the bar” of instruction and ensure that seventh graders learn to practice the strategies that characterize skilled readers and writers. It is certainly possible to accomplish this goal using the literary anthologies and novels already in place.

The difference will be that in Pre-AP classroom, planning begins with skills, not with content. Pre-AP teachers choose texts for study because they lend themselves to practicing a certain skill or to reinforcing a concept. Of course, it is of great importance that the texts are interesting, related to the students' lives and experiences, and geared for the students' reading level. Any rich, layered, meaningful, thematically intriguing book, story, essays, play, poem, or other text can be used by students to practice literary analysis and as a basis for analytical writing. The key is to choose works that reinforce Pre-AP skills. A handy reference for skill-based Pre-AP planning can be found in the skills progression charts in this guide.

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Pre AP teachers are free to rely on those strategies or techniques they feel will work. Effective teachers are innovative, not afraid of “the new” nor overly comfortable with “the old.” They read new textbooks and journal articles; attend College Board-sponsored workshops and other professional development opportunities to scout out new or better teaching techniques, and model reading and writing for their students, remaining creatively open to the “teachable moments” and to student suggestions. The Pre-AP journey depends on dedicated, enthusiastic teachers who guide, navigate, and provide students with a safe haven for learning.

Pre-AP course syllabi take many different forms, but all are based on developing the students analytical, reading, grammar, and composition skills.

Close Reading

What is close reading?

In Pre-AP classes, students learn to do a special kind of analytical reading called “close reading.” When readers look at a text this way, they notice details, images, diction, aspects of point of view, and the way the writer constructs sentences. Noting these devices in the text and examining their emotional impact can often reveal layers of meaning that lie below the surface of

Close reading means

- learning to paraphrase accurately
- reading for more than plot
- looking for more than one layer of meaning (personal, universal, political, moral, spiritual, etc.)
- awareness of the effect of word choice, images, and details in the text that have emotional overtones
- looking for patterns and similarities

the work.

Pre-AP students normally study a blend of many different kinds of texts from diverse time periods and cultures. The well-read student gains perspective and a broadened world-view through personal reading choices as well as from class-based reading. Regardless of the text, Pre-AP students move toward the highest level of reading as they learn to examine more closely the works they read. The three reading levels are

- on the line
- between the lines
- beyond the lines

At the first level, students find meaning directly in the text.

At the second level, students interpret what is in the text.

At the third level, students move out of the text to connect to universal meaning.

- *They move from the “What?” of the text to the “So what?”*
- *At this level, they connect literature with their own experience and with universal themes.*

If they begin early enough, students can easily learn to look for diction, imagery, and detail that give the reader hints about the author’s attitude toward the subject (tone). In turn, an awareness of the author’s tone can often point the way to meaning (theme). This analytical and interpretive process is the key to success in upper-level advanced placement classes. Students who begin to practice this skill early on with simpler works have a huge advantage when they reach the higher grades and are required to analyze much more complex and sophisticated texts.

Pre-AP readers

- highlight and annotate texts
- write text-based analysis in reading journals
- practice analytical skills one at a time
- read for meaning and personal relevance
- recognize and analyze basic literary elements
- read many different kinds of texts
- look for diction, imagery, and detail that reveals tone and theme

What other reading skills and activities will Pre-AP students need?

- Students, more often than not, will need to develop the habit of reading independently at home because class time will most often be developed to working with the texts in order to examine their meaning.
- Pre-AP English students benefit from reading literature from many different time periods or eras. Interpreting unfamiliar language and wrestling with new ideas are activities that strengthen students’ minds and sharpen their powers of observation and analysis
- Reading texts that reflect cultural diversity as well as translated texts from non-English-speaking cultures exposes students to new concepts, unfamiliar ways, and different ideas.

- By reading independently and choosing a blend of all types of literature, students will improve their insight into authors' purposes and themes and will be prepared better to write analytically about the text rather than merely summarizing plot.
- Students who read widely and thoughtfully will begin to find their way toward a writing style of their own, choosing techniques to add to their repertoire from the literary stylists they study in class.

Grammar

In sixth grade, students learn the parts of speech, learn to distinguish independent from dependent clauses, practice writing the four basic sentence types, practice the use of the comma and semicolon, and begin to vary their sentences by using sentence combining techniques, different sentence beginnings, and rhetorical techniques like repetition. All of this content is of major importance, and sixth grade students are, for the most part, just being introduced to many of these concepts. Seventh graders require extensive practice just to reinforce the grammar skills they began learning in the previous year.

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It is vital that students learn and practice these grammar skills in the context of their study of literature and composition. Grammar instruction in isolation is just not as effective as active manipulation of the language that takes place along with reading and writing when students find prepositional phrases and infinitive phrases in the poems they are reading and when they then write poems that contain phrases, they understand how the use of prepositional and infinitive phrases adds detail, movement, and rhythm to their writing. They also tend to remember *what* these phrases are and *how* their use enhances writing.

Seventh graders add to their language skills by investigating the relationships between verbs and their objects and complements. They also add appositive phrases to their writing toolbox,

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giving them yet another way to add detail to their writing. They experiment with reverse sentence order to add to the sentence variety at their disposal. All these new concepts and skills are important, but the most vital grammar concept that students at this level should

master is the creative manipulation of independent and dependent clauses. If seventh grade students can grasp and retain the idea of these two structures and their various combinations, their study of punctuation, syntax, and paragraph development will fall naturally into place.

Composition

Seventh grade writers will build on the writing practice they did in Pre-AP Sixth Grade English. They began then to use language structures purposefully and to become acquainted with

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the various types of phrases and clauses. They started to develop a widely varied vocabulary in order to have words at their disposal that express exactly the right feeling and meaning for their writing purposes. They began to experiment with sentence structure, playing with word order, sentence beginnings, and verb choice and placement.

In seventh grade, students can develop these composition skills even further by

- learning how to use quotations as evidence
- practicing techniques for developing effective body paragraphs
- experimenting with forms and types of organization they invent themselves, as well as practicing organization and transition skills with pre-set forms
- adding new literary devices and techniques to their writing toolboxes and continuing to use the ones they learned last year with more skill and complexity
- continuing to write in many different modes and on widely varied topics
- revising, reworking, and restructuring their writing by developing several drafts of their long term essays
- increasing the length of their timed writing essays
- writing daily to develop their fluency
- evaluating their own writing and that of others for quality and depth of perception
- using techniques of argumentation and persuasion in their writing
- reflecting on the specific feedback available when teachers grade student essays using skill-based rubrics

Assessment

Closely associated with writing is assessment. With the exception of objective test questions, everything else students do in their English classes is subjective. Therefore, their teachers carefully analyze every assignment and decide exactly what they want students to do and how they will assess it before they give it to their students. Because teachers need an objective way to assign grades to subjective products, the use of rubrics enhances teachers' effectiveness. Different from a scoring guide that assigns point-values to various elements of a final product, a rubric describes the various levels of achievement possible on the assignment. When teachers design and use good rubrics, both they and their students benefit in many different ways.

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Assessment Using Rubrics

- Students and parents know what teachers expect before and after the assignment is submitted and graded.
- Students receive detailed, specific feedback on their work without their teachers having to spend large amounts of time writing comments and corrections.
- Students receive developmental help with their writing by seeing what they could have done better described in the higher scoring ranges.
- Teachers save time by grading only for what they have described in the rubric.
- Teachers are not reduced to grading for “effort,” but instead grade the quality of the final product.

One of the hardest aspects of teaching Pre-AP and AP English is the constant pressure from parents and students to inflate grades. Teachers need to help them understand that achieving a “100” rarely occurs. Pre-AP teachers who instill good study habits and realistic expectations in their students help maintain quality programs.

Seventh graders and their teachers will have discovered roads “less traveled by” during this year and visited wondrous sights through literature. They will marvel that the Pre-AP classroom has been the vehicle taking them to the many-hued land of language and lofty ideas. After a short rest, it will be time to refuel for the next journey, another adventure even better than the first.