

Comprehensive Review—Synthesis

IN THIS CHAPTER

Summary: Examine the synthesis purpose and process.

KEY IDEA

Key Ideas

- ✦ Practice with reading and evaluating different types of texts from various mediums, including graphics.
- ✦ Work with summary, paraphrase, and inference.
- ✦ Learn different approaches to incorporating sources into the text of your essay.

Some Basics

What Is the Synthesis Essay?

Synthesis is the process in which you, as the writer, develop a thesis and, in the course of developing this thesis,

- you investigate a variety of sources, both print and visual;
- you choose which of these sources to include in your presentation;
- you respond to these sources and discuss how they relate to your position on the topic.

Note: A well-respected and experienced Advanced Placement English instructor, Jodi Rice, uses the following example to clarify the idea of *synthesis*: You're having a dinner party and consult two recipes you've been given and use bits of each to create your own, new dish. You let your dinner guests know you invented the dish, but that you used and combined recipes from your grandmother and from the newspaper. You don't take credit for those two recipes, but you do take credit for what you did with them.



In the case of the AP Language exam, you only have time to write a first draft, and it must be clear, organized, logical, and thoughtful. In developing each of your major points, make certain to

- Relate it to the thesis/claim
- Use specific examples (personal and otherwise)
- Use selected sources to support the major point
- Incorporate sources into the development of your point by using:
 - Attribution and introduction of cited sources
 - Transitions
 - Mix of direct quotations, summary, and paraphrases

A Few Comments Before Beginning

Your AP Language class, as well as other courses across the curriculum, have taught you how to conduct, evaluate, and present research. You most likely have completed at least one research paper that required you to develop a thesis on a particular subject; to find, read, and annotate outside sources related to the topic; to determine which of the sources to use in support of your thesis; to incorporate these sources into your research paper; and to appropriately cite your sources.

If you've written this type of paper before, whether brief or lengthy, you're well on your way to being able to compose a successful synthesis essay.

The synthesis essay also requires you to be familiar with both analysis and argument. Because of this, we strongly urge you to review Chapters 5, 6, 8, and 9. Those skills needed to develop a successful essay of analysis or argument are requisites for composing a synthesis essay.

This chapter briefly reviews strategies and provides you with practice activities specifically related to writing the synthesis essay as it would most probably appear on the AP English Language exam.

Let's begin.

Note: We will use the synthesis prompt and sample essay from the Master exam (Chapter 4) as the basis for the following review segments.

Strategies

Strategy 1: Critical Reading of Texts



A word about the texts: The several texts you will be given for the synthesis prompt will be related to the topic, and you can be assured that each text has been evaluated and judged to be appropriate, of acceptable quality, and representing several points of view.



Critical reading of texts specifically for the synthesis essay demands that you determine the following:

- Purpose/thesis
- Intended audience
- Type of source (primary, secondary)
- Main points
- Historical context
- Authority of the author
- How the material is presented
- Type of evidence presented
- Source of the evidence
- Any bias or agenda
- How the text relates to the topic
- Support or opposition toward the thesis

Practice with Critical Reading

Our example: Here is a text provided in the Master exam's synthesis essay.

Source E

Broder, John M., "States Curbing Right to Seize Private Homes." *New York Times*, February 21, 2006.

The following passage is excerpted from an article published in the *New York Times*.

"Our opposition to eminent domain is not across the board," he [Scott G. Bullock of the Institute for Justice] said. "It has an important but limited role in government planning and the building of roads, parks, and public buildings. What we oppose is eminent domain abuse for private development, and we are encouraging legislators to curtail it."

More neutral observers expressed concern that state officials, in their zeal to protect homeowners and small businesses, would handcuff local governments that are trying to revitalize dying cities and fill in blighted areas with projects that produce tax revenues and jobs.

"It's fair to say that many states are on the verge of seriously overreacting to the Kelo decision," said John D. Echeverria, executive director of the Georgetown Environmental Law and Policy Institute and an authority on land-use policy. "The danger is that some legislators are going to attempt to destroy what is a significant and sometimes painful but essential government power. The extremist position is a prescription for economic decline for many metropolitan areas around the county."

Our writer's critical reading of the passage provides the following information:

1. **Thesis:** "... What we oppose is eminent domain abuse for private development, and we are encouraging legislators to curtail it."
2. **Intended audience:** generally educated readers
3. **Main points:**
 - A. qualified opposition to eminent domain
 - B. opposed to eminent domain for private development
 - C. acknowledges that there are those who see their position as handcuffing local officials
 - D. Echeverria says, "The danger . . ." He fears legislation could destroy essential government power.

4. Historical context: 2006 in response to *Kelo* decision
5. How material is presented: Thesis + expert's direct quotation + acknowledgement of opposition + expert's direct quotation
6. Type of evidence presented: direct quotations of experts in the field
7. Source of evidence: expert opinions
8. Any bias or agenda: both sides of issue are presented
9. How text relates to the topic: specific statements for and against eminent domain
10. Support or not for thesis: one quotation supports a qualifying position: "I can empathize with the home owners affected by the recent 5:4 Supreme Court decision." The other quotation could be used to recognize those who would oppose it.

Note: This is a process that does not necessarily require that every point be written out. You could easily make mental notes of many of these items and jot down only those that you think you could use in your essay. You may prefer to annotate directly on the text itself.

Practice

Now, you complete a critical reading of another text from the Master exam on eminent domain.

Source C

Kelo v. New London. U.S. Supreme Court 125 S. Ct. 2655.

The following is a brief overview of a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2005.

Suzette Kelo, et al. v. City of New London, et al., 125 S. Ct. 2655 (2005), more commonly *Kelo v. New London*, is a land-use law case argued before the United States Supreme Court on February 22, 2005. The case arose from a city's use of eminent domain to condemn privately owned real property so that it could be used as part of a comprehensive redevelopment plan.

The owners sued the city in Connecticut courts, arguing that the city had misused its eminent domain power. The power of eminent domain is limited by the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. The Fifth Amendment, which restricts the actions of the federal government, says in part that "private property [shall not] be taken for public use, without just compensation"; under Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment, this limitation is also imposed on the actions of U.S. state and local governments. *Kelo* and the other appellants argued that economic development, the stated purpose of the Development Corporation, did not qualify as public use.

The Supreme Court's Ruling: This 5:4 decision holds that the governmental taking of property from one private owner to give to another in furtherance of economic development constitutes a permissible "public use" under the Fifth Amendment.

1. Purpose/thesis: _____

2. Intended audience: _____
3. Main points: _____

4. Historical context: _____
5. How material is presented: _____

6. Type of evidence presented: _____

7. Source of evidence: _____
8. Any bias or agenda: _____
9. How text relates to topic: _____

10. Support or opposition for my thesis: _____

What Types of Visual Texts Can I Expect on the AP Language Exam?

You can expect to encounter a variety of visual sources on the AP Language exam. They may include:

- Political cartoons
- Charts and graphs
- Posters
- Advertising
- Paintings
- Photographs

As with the steps involved in the critical reading of written material, visuals also require critical analysis. The following are steps you should consider when faced with a visual text:

- Identify the subject of the visual.
- Identify the major components, such as characters, visual details, and symbols.
- Identify verbal clues, such as titles, tag lines, date, author, and dialogue.
- Notice position and size of details.
- Does the visual take a positive or negative position toward the issue?
- Identify the primary purpose of the visual.
- Determine how each detail illustrates and/or supports the primary purpose.
- Does the author indicate alternative viewpoints?

What Follows Is a Sample Critical Reading of a Political Cartoon Taken from the Master Exam

One type of text that could be used for the synthesis essay prompt on the AP English Language exam is the political cartoon. No, AP Language has not turned into a history or journalism course. But, it does recognize the variety of texts that can be created to advance or illustrate a particular thesis. The political cartoon does in a single or multiple frame presentation what would take hundreds of words in an essay, editorial, and so forth. It is a visual presentation of a specific point of view on an issue.

Note: Even though the synthesis essay prompt may include political cartoons, or charts, or surveys, you are not required to use any of them. Your choice of texts depends on your purpose.

When dealing with a political cartoon, here are the specific steps to consider that are adapted from the critical reading of a visual.

KEY IDEA

STRATEGY

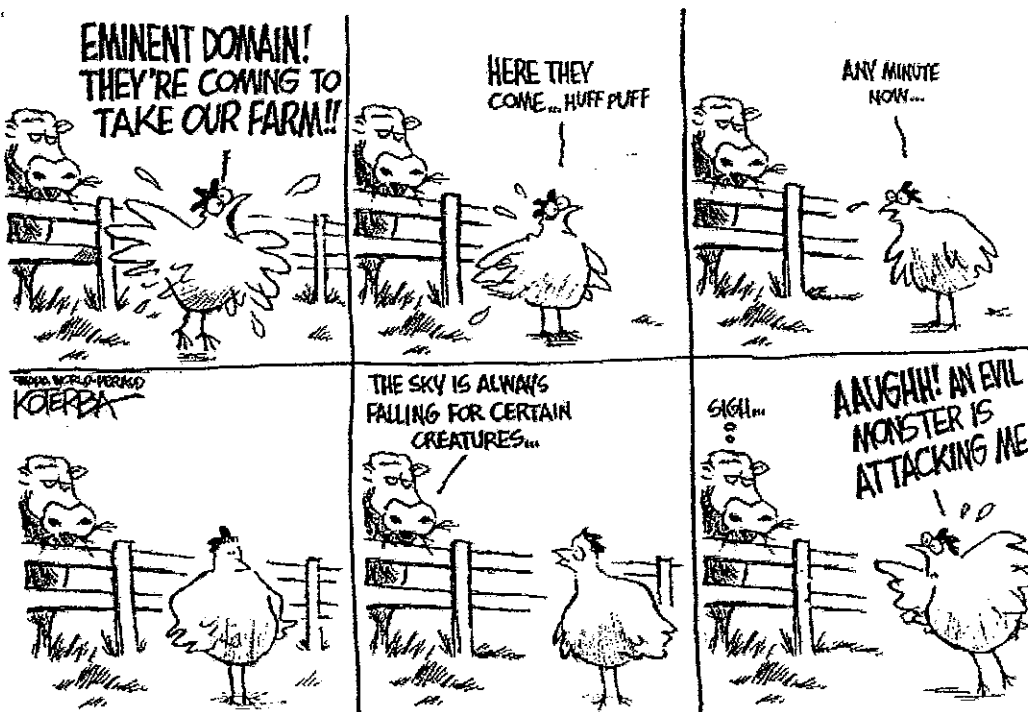
- Identify the subject of the cartoon.
- Identify the major components, such as characters, visual details, and symbols.
- Identify verbal clues, such as titles, tag lines, date, cartoonist, and dialogue.
- Notice position and size of details within the frame.
- Does the cartoon take a positive or negative position toward the issue?
- Identify the primary purpose of the cartoon.
- Determine how each detail illustrates and/or supports the primary purpose.
- Does the cartoonist indicate alternative viewpoints?

Notice that a political cartoon assumes the reader is aware of current events surrounding the specific issue. So, we recommend you begin to read a newspaper or news magazine regularly and/or watch a daily news program on TV. Even listening to a five-minute news summary on the radio as you drive to and from errands or school can give you a bit of background on what's happening in the world around you.

Example: Source D, political cartoon

The following political cartoon appeared in an Omaha, Nebraska, newspaper.

Jeff Koterba, *Omaha World Herald*, NE



1. Subject of the cartoon: eminent domain.
2. Major components: one chicken, one cow in a barnyard.
3. Verbal clues: Print size and form indicates the chicken is very excited, even panicked, while the cow is calm and unimpressed.
4. Position and size of details: The chicken and cow are drawn mostly to scale and perspective with the chicken taking center stage.
5. Position of the cartoonist: Sees fears surrounding eminent domain as overexaggerated.

6. Primary purpose of the cartoon: Ridicule those who believe that all is lost if eminent domain remains in effect.
7. How details illustrate the primary purpose: Size and form of print indicates the chicken's state of mind. The sigh of the calmly chewing cow indicates its recognition of the chicken's silly warning. The chicken's last warning that says the cow is a threatening monster is just wrong and over the top.
8. Indication of alternative viewpoints: Yes, both sides are indicated.

As pointed out previously, each of these steps is important in understanding a political cartoon, but it is not necessary that you write out each of them every time you come across one in the newspaper, and so forth. Most of the analysis is done quickly in your mind, but when you are practicing techniques and strategies, it is most beneficial to write out, just as our writer did, each of the previous eight steps.

Practice critically reading political cartoons that you find in newspapers and news magazines. You might even try a few included in your history textbook.

Strategy 2: Selecting Sources

Once you've carefully read the prompt, critically read each of the given texts, and decided on your claim, you must choose which of the sources you will use in your essay. This choice is dependent on your answers to the following:

- What is your purpose?
- Is the text background information or pertinent information?
- Does the source give new information or information that other sources cover?
- Is this information that will add depth to the essay?
- Does this text reflect the viewpoints of any of the other texts?
- Does this text contradict the viewpoints of any of the other texts?
- Does the source support or oppose your claim?

Our writer has to make some important decisions about the seven texts provided in the Master synthesis essay prompt. As the writer answers each of the previous questions, he or she will decide which texts to use in the essay.

My purpose: to qualify the support and opposition to eminent domain

Background information: *Constitution* (Source A) *Kelo* decision (Source C)

Pertinent information: *60 Minutes* (Source B) Broder (Source E) Survey (Source G)

A helpful technique to answer the next several questions is to construct a quick chart that incorporates all of the sources at once. The following is a sample of such a chart.

SOURCE	TYPE OF INFO	ADDS DEPTH	REFLECTS VIEWS OTHER TEXTS	SUPPORT OF CLAIM OF
A	Primary and covered by Sources C and E	Yes	No	Yes and no
B	Covered by Sources C–G	Yes	Yes	Yes
C	Covered by Sources A, D, E	Yes	Yes, Sources D, G	Yes and no
D	Covered by Sources A, C	Not really	Yes, Sources A, C	Yes and no
E	Covered by Source B, F, G	Yes	Yes, Sources B, F, G	Yes and no
F	Covered by Sources B, E, G	Not really	Yes, Sources B, E, G	Yes and no
G	Covered by Sources B–F	Yes	Yes, Sources B–F	Yes



There certainly is a great deal of information to gather and consider. The good news is that the more practice you have with this process, the more quickly you will be able to complete the task. Writing the answers to the previous questions for each of the given texts is a good practice technique for you. But when it comes to a timed writing situation, you will be annotating the given texts as you read them and jotting down brief notes that reflect the type of thinking our writer performed previously. You will NOT have time to write answers to each question for each text. But you WILL be thinking about them as you read and as you plan.

Practice responding to these questions using editorials, letters to the editor, and editorial cartoons that revolve around current event issues in which you have an interest. Don't ignore your school and local newspapers, and columnists in news magazines and newspapers. **Become an informed reader and citizen!**

After carefully considering each of the given texts, our reader has decided to eliminate both political cartoons because neither seems to add much depth. The other five sources can be used to develop a position.

Strategy 3: Choosing Which Parts of the Selected Texts to Use

Pay no attention to those texts you have eliminated. For those sources you have chosen to include in your essay, do the following:

- Review the notes/highlights on each of your chosen passages.
- Ignore those items you have not annotated.
- Determine if each excerpt contributes to the development of your thesis.
 - Identify the major point each will support.
 - Does it strengthen your position or not (if not, ignore it)?
 - How much of the excerpt will you use?
 - Why have it in your essay?
 - What comments can you make about it?

For example: You might construct a chart such as the following:

SOURCE:	A	B	C	E	G
	-Use all of excerpt	-City ¶ 1	-ID Kelo case ¶ 1	-Bullock “.” 1st line in title	-Survey ID
	-Use in Intro	-Background ¶ 1	-Summary in ¶ 3	-Echeverría “.” Line 1, ¶ 3	-Major result lines 1 & 2
		-1st “.” ¶ 2			
		-Mayor’s position “.” ¶ 7			
		-Blighted ¶ 8			

Our writer now has a clear idea of what part(s) of each text to use. The next task is to plan the essay. The following are some planning notes:

*INTRO: Background
Basic prompt info
My room when grandmother visits
My position—qualify*

POINT 1: Kelo decision + Saleets (oppose current ruling)
Saleets' mayor (support ruling)
My comments

POINT 2: Broder = Bullock & Echeverria (both qualify and for ruling)
Survey

With this brief outline in mind, our writer knows where to place each of the chosen excerpts. If this were a class situation that allotted time for prewriting plans, more details would be possible when constructing the outline.

Note: Our writer chose to jot down a brief outline, but could have chosen to plan the essay in a number of different ways, such as:

- Mapping
- Charting

As we stated earlier in this chapter, for the AP English Language exam, you only have time to write a first draft, and it must be clear, organized, logical, and thoughtful. In developing each of your major points, make certain to:

- Relate it to the thesis/claim
- Use specific examples (personal and otherwise)
- Use selected sources to support the major point
- Incorporate sources into the development of your point
 - Attribution and introduction of cited sources
 - Transitions
 - Mix of direct quotations, summary, and paraphrases


 STRATEGY

A Note About Summary, Paraphrase, and Inference


 KEY IDEA

No doubt you have been constructing summaries, paraphrases, and inferences as you learned the techniques of close reading and research. As a quick review, here are the definitions of these processes and an example of each. If you have any further questions, we strongly recommend you ask your instructor for clarification and further examples and/or practice.

Summary

If you want to summarize a text, you read closely and locate those key words and/or phrases that enable you to reduce the piece into its essential point(s).

Example: The previous *New York Times* article by Broder

Number of words in given text: 175

Number of key words underlined: 47

Summary based on the key words and phrases: *For many, the debate about eminent domain centers around opposing local governments using it to seize private property for private development or supporting eminent domain because cities face economic disaster without this necessary power.* (34 words)

Comments: The writer has whittled the original down by more than 73 percent to its essential point.

Practice this strategy on newspaper or magazine articles that you read regularly.

Note: Many online databases provide abstracts of longer articles when you perform a search. You might want to seek these out and read them to see how they are constructed to emphasize only the main points of the articles (Jodi Rice).

Paraphrase

To paraphrase a given text or part of a text, you transpose the original material into your own words. This will probably be close to the number of words in the original. In most cases, you need to cite the original.

Example: The first paragraph in the previous Source C

Paraphrase: *Kelo v. New London is an eminent domain case that was presented to the U.S. Supreme Court in February of 2005. The argument centered around New London using the power of eminent domain to seize private property so that it could be sold and used in the redevelopment of a section of this city (Source C).*

Comments: The original contains 67 words and two sentences, and the 54 word paraphrase is also two sentences long. Our writer has eliminated specific court numbers and the day of the month and combined several phrases into briefer and more direct ones. **Because this background on the Kelo case is NOT common knowledge and because our writer is NOT a recognized expert in this field, a citation is necessary.**

Practice this technique on sections of your own course textbooks and on newspaper or magazine articles you read regularly. You might also try to paraphrase the Master exam synthesis prompt itself, both the introduction and the assignment.

Inference

An inference is the process of drawing a conclusion based on specific material. By carefully considering the important information provided in the text, the reader reaches a conclusion or makes a judgment.

Example: Source B given in the synthesis essay prompt

Inference: *Considering the amount of time given to the Saleets as compared to the mayor of their town, one could conclude that 60 Minutes is more inclined to side with the homeowners over the local government in this eminent domain confrontation.*

Comments: Seven out of the ten paragraphs in this interview are positively related to the Saleets or their problem. The rhetorical question and answer given by the voiceover in paragraph five is indicative of the position of *60 Minutes*, and the diction used to describe both sides of the issue is more favorable toward the position of the Saleets.

Practice making inferences based on editorials or letters to the editor that you find in your local newspapers. Go a step further. Take a close look at ads you find in the magazines you read regularly and draw some conclusions about their purpose, their intended audience, and the specific way the ads are presented. Remember, you must be able to support each of your inferences from specifics found in the text itself.

Strategy 4: Incorporating Sources into the Text of Your Essay

Let's be realistic. The synthesis essay is not just a list of direct quotations from sources related to the topic. Once you have chosen your passages, you need to place them appropri-

ately and interestingly within the actual text of your essay in the order that you've planned to best support your thesis/claim.

Just how do you do this? You could select from among the following techniques:

Direct quotation—full citation provided at beginning of the sentence

John Broder in his February 21, 2006, New York Times article titled "States Curb-ing Right to Seize Private Homes," quotes Scott G. Bullock of the Institute for Justice: "Our opposition to eminent domain is not across the board . . . What we oppose is eminent domain abuse for private development, and we are encouraging legislators to curtail it."

Direct quotation—citation placed outside the text

In a 60 Minutes interview presented on July 4, 2004, Jim Saleet, a homeowner being adversely affected by the current eminent domain policy, stated, "The bottom line is this is morally wrong . . . This is our home . . . We're not blighted. This is a close-knit, beautiful neighborhood" (Source E).

Paraphrase of and direct quotation from the third paragraph—citation placed outside of the text

John D. Echeverria, an authority on land-use policy, sees a danger arising from legisla-tures doing away with many of the powers of eminent domain. For the Director of the Georgetown Environmental Law and Policy Institute, if this policy change takes place across the country, there is a real danger that many urban areas will experience "eco-nomic decline" (Source E).

Combination of direct quotation and paraphrase—citation provided outside of text; note the use of the ellipsis

In 2005, a 5–4 Supreme Court decision in the Kelo v. New London case ruled that ". . . the government taking of property from private owner to give to another in fur-therance of economic development constitutes a permissible 'public use' under the Fifth Amendment" (Source C).

Notice that each of the examples integrates the source material into the text. The infor-mation is not just plopped down on the page. Take a close look at how our writer integrates the second example into the following paragraph in his essay.

Contrary to what the Court sees as "permissible public use" (Source C), I believe that a government taking a person's home or business away and allowing another private individual or company to take it over goes against the idea of our private property rights. A good example of this is the situation in Lakewood, Ohio, where the mayor wants to condemn a retired couple's home in order to make way for a privately owned, high-end condominium and shopping mall. As Jim Saleet said in his interview with 60 Minutes presented on July 4, 2004, "The bottom line is this is morally wrong . . . This is our home . . . We're not blighted. This is a close-knit, beautiful neighbor-hood." The Saleets who have paid off their mortgage should be allowed to remain there as long as they want and pass it on to their children. Here, individual rights should prevail.

Comments: Our writer uses the sources to establish negative feelings toward the current policy. The writer then refers to the *Kelo* decision in a summary and proceeds to introduce the context of the Saleet reference with the transition phrase, “A good example of this is . . .” Cohesiveness is achieved by referring to Source C, which was previously cited in the essay. The actual quotation is incorporated into the text with an introductory dependent clause. Two related sentences follow that reemphasize the writer’s own position.

Practice: As you read, become aware of HOW professional writers incorporate sources into their writing. Use these as models to practice incorporating outside sources into your own sentences and/or essays.

Note: You might want to take a close look at reviews of movies and books. In many cases, you will find they include direct quotations from the dialog of the film or passages from the book.

Strategy 5: Writing the Conclusion

Our writer has used each of the excerpts in the body of the essay, EXCEPT for the survey information. Although this number is quite important, it does not fit into the development of the body paragraphs. Therefore, the writer decides to incorporate this survey result into the conclusion. It will contribute to a strong final statement. Following are three different ways to use the survey.

Direct quotation—citation after sentence

68% of survey respondents said that they “favored legislative limits on the government’s ability to take private property away from owners . . .” (Source G).

Direct quotation—citation within sentence

According to a survey conducted by CNN on July 23, 2005, 66% of those responding said “never” to the question, “Should local governments be able to seize homes and businesses?”

Paraphrase—citation outside sentence

In recent polls conducted by both the Washington Times and CNN, over 60% said no when asked if local governments should be able to take over private homes and businesses (Source G).

Carefully consider how this sentence is incorporated into the concluding paragraph.

Ultimately, I have to agree with the large majority of people who responded to recent polls conducted by both the Washington Times and CNN. When asked if local governments should be able to take over private homes and businesses, over 60% said “no” (Source G). But, I will have to be open to the possibility that public use and the greater good may, in some cases, be the only viable solution to a complicated problem.

Comments: The source material is sandwiched between two effective sentences. The first presents our writer’s position and leads the reader to the cited excerpt employed to make the point. The last sentence begins with the word “But,” which indicates that the writer is qualifying the cited sources in this paragraph and throughout the essay.

Final Comment

Remember, you **MUST** establish a position and each source you choose to use **MUST** support and develop your position.

Rapid Review

- Establish a position on the issue.
- Critically read all given texts and any introductory material provided.
- Annotate your sources using the critical reading guidelines.
- Select appropriate sources to support your position and purpose.
- Choose appropriate excerpts from each of the selected sources that can help develop the thesis.
- Summarize, paraphrase, and draw inferences from selected material.
- Make certain you properly cite each source you incorporate into the essay.
- Construct a conclusion that clearly states a strong, final point.
- Proofread.

