

## **SUCCESS AS AN AP STUDENT ...**

... requires you to operate on a very high level of maturity. A mature participant in any process guides their actions based on an understanding of the process. This document tries to accomplish two things. This document is designed to give you an understanding of why AP courses are the way they are. Also, this document is designed to provide simple guidance on what this means for you as a student. Like the AP courses themselves, this document is not just about the college level material you will face this year. What you learn about being a successful student in AP courses is relevant to being a successful student in college courses.

## **What makes AP courses the way they are?**

As we proceed through our education many things change about the courses we take. Obviously, material gets more sophisticated as we advance. But an equally important change is the amount of material we are expected to learn in a given period of time. Of all the courses you can take in your years before college, AP courses ask you to learn the most in the shortest period of time.

AP courses are different from your prior courses in many ways, but this fact – the quantity you are expected to learn – drives the choices your teacher will make and the ways you must behave to succeed. You will not succeed in an AP course if you do not recognize these circumstances and respond to them properly.

**What this means for the student.** Below is a list of things done by successful AP students - students who do not wonder why they are doing poorly, but rather wonder why the AP class seems so reasonable. This is not some idealized list for teacher's pets; these are the requirements:

- Read assignments thoroughly in advance.
- Read ahead of schedule as much as possible.
- Do the outside assignments in advance of deadlines.
- Take notes in advance, in class and ask questions in class.
- Make old work part of studying.
- Use classmates wisely and appropriately.
- Do extra reading and work.

Here is why.

- 1) Read assignments thoroughly in advance. Pretend, when reading, that your book is your only teacher. Much of the learning process occurs outside of class. Readings outside of class will often be the sole source of material you are expected to know and to understand. If you expect the teacher to repeat the contents of the book in class, you are in the wrong level. In the earlier years of your education, every fact you needed to know was said in class. In an AP class, class discussion will direct your learning, will give you an opportunity to ask questions, and will help provide connections to ideas not covered in the text.
- 2) Read ahead of schedule as much as possible. Given the large amount of material, the teacher chooses what to discuss in class with great care. However, the teacher may not choose to discuss what you, being who you are, would understand from reading the book alone. If you do not at least keep up with the reading schedule, you will miss the best, and perhaps only, opportunity to identify and to address things that you did not understand in the readings.
- 3) Do the outside assignments in advance of deadlines. Homework serves several purposes. In an AP course the least of these is to give the teacher something to grade. More than anything else, assignments outside of class must be looked at as a self test. Doing work early gives you a chance to discover what you are struggling with and to ask questions about those topics. Also, if you know early on what the assignments are asking of you, then you can listen more effectively in class to understand what you need to know for

the assignment. You know and I know this is not a matter of doing more work; it is just a matter of discipline in planning and scheduling the work you are responsible for doing.

- 4) Take notes in advance, in class and ask questions in class. With more material to choose from, you can be sure what your teacher chooses to do and to say in class are truly critical. You can trust that what your teacher is doing is giving you an experience, information, or insights that you WILL NOT get from working with the book alone. Do not trust that you can figure out things you missed in class by looking at the book later - take notes and ask questions in class.
- 5) Make your old work part of your studying. Another major purpose of your homework is to prepare you for the challenges of the test. At any point in the course you should be able to go back and look at old work and say, "I know exactly why I got that grade. I know what I did right. I know what not to do again." If you can't, ask your teacher. You need to do this. In the early years of your education the teachers drilled you, assessed your faults, and steered you in class. As you mature as learner, you must take on more of this work yourself and become a reflective learner.
- 6) Use your classmates wisely and appropriately. Study groups are a great thing. There is so much material in these courses you are sure to miss something. Discussion of the material with other students will not only give you another perspective, but will also make sure you do not miss something. It also lets you check that you are reaching the same level of understanding other students are reaching.

However, doing work with other students, versus simply discussing the work, is dangerous territory. The obvious danger is running afoul of academic integrity issues. However, the other is that, without knowing it, you cheat yourself of a learning experience by slipping into follow-the-leader.

One way of thinking can save you from both dangers. If you find yourself leaning over another person's work to copy their words or pictures or you hear yourself saying, "Repeat that (or 'Slow down') so I can write it down," you have crossed a line.

From another perspective: Remember to regard all your fellow students as equals. Everyone has something to bring to the table. Do not trust any fellow student as an infallible expert.

- 7) Do extra reading and work. Every AP student finds, at some time, they still doubt if they understand everything. At these times, extra work is an excellent self-test, confidence builder, and source of questions. You may want to acquire an AP Preparation/Practice book from a local bookstore.

Believe this document. If you do not, speak to successful AP students, college students, and unsuccessful AP students and college students. You will find that these behaviors account for much of the differences between the two.