

Name:

Section:

Date:

Score:

Your mission for the following activity is to read ten past AP Lang argument prompts, and create a thesis statement for each. The purpose of this activity is to get you in the habit of creating specific, defensible and focused thesis statements that will put you in the position to write an excellent essay.

1. Many people spend long hours trying to achieve perfection in their personal or professional lives. Similarly, people often demand perfection from others, creating expectations that may be challenging to live up to. In contrast, some people think perfection is not attainable or desirable.

Write an essay that argues your position on the value of striving for perfection.

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2. The term “overrated” is often used to diminish concepts, places, roles, etc. that the speaker believes do not deserve the prestige they commonly enjoy; for example, many writers have argued that success is overrated, a character in a novel by Anthony Burgess famously describes Rome as a “vastly overrated city,” and Queen Rania of Jordan herself has asserted that “[b]eing queen is overrated.”

Select a concept, place, role, etc. to which you believe that the term “overrated” should be applied. Then, write a well-developed essay in which you explain your judgment. Use appropriate evidence from your reading, experience, or observations to support your argument.

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3. In her book *Gift from the Sea*, author and aviator Anne Morrow Lindbergh writes, “We tend not to choose the unknown which might be a shock or disappointment or simply a little difficult to cope with. And yet it is the unknown with all its disappointments and surprises that is the most enriching.”

Consider the value Lindbergh places on choosing the unknown. Then write an essay in which you develop your own position on the value of exploring the unknown. Use appropriate, specific evidence to illustrate and develop your position.

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4. The passage below is an excerpt from *Empire of Illusion* by Chris Hedges. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you develop a position on Hedges’ argument that “the most essential skill...is artifice.” Use appropriate, specific evidence to illustrate and develop your position.

The most essential skill in political theater and a consumer culture is artifice. Political leaders, who use the tools of mass propaganda to create a sense of faux intimacy with citizens, no longer need to be competent, sincere, or honest. They need only to appear to have these qualities. Most of all they need a story, a personal narrative. The reality of the narrative is irrelevant. It can be completely at odds with the facts. The consistency and emotional appeal of the story are paramount. Those who are best at deception succeed. Those who have not mastered the art of entertainment, who fail to create a narrative or do not have one fashioned for them by their handlers, are ignored. They become “unreal.” An image-based culture communicates through narratives, pictures, and pseudo-drama.

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5. In 1891, Irish author Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) observed, "Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion."

Wilde claims that disobedience is a valuable human trait and that it promotes social progress. Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Wilde's claims are valid. Use appropriate examples from your reading, experience, or observations to support your argument

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6. An anthropologist studying first-year students at a university in the United States writes that friendly phrases like "How are you?," "Nice to meet you," and "Let's get in touch" communicate politeness rather than literal intent. What, if anything, is the value or function of such polite speech?

In a well-written essay, develop your position on the value or function of polite speech in a culture or community with which you are familiar. Use appropriate evidence from your reading, experience, or observations to support your argument.

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7. Authors Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman published “The Creativity Crisis” in Newsweek.com in July 2010. They reported that the Torrance Test, a test of creativity that has been administered to millions of people worldwide in 50 languages, indicates that the public’s “creativity quotient” has steadily crept downward since 1990. In their article, Bronson and Merryman cite the claim of Professor Kyung Hee Kim at the College of William and Mary: “It’s very clear, and the decrease is very significant.” Kim reports that it is the scores of younger children in America—from kindergarten through sixth grade—for whom the decline is “most serious.”

Bronson and Merryman state that “[t]he potential consequences are sweeping. The necessity of human ingenuity is undisputed. A recent IBM poll of 1,500 CEOs identified creativity as the No. 1 ‘leadership competency’ of the future. Yet it’s not just about sustaining our nation’s economic growth. All around us are matters of national and international importance that are crying out for creative solutions, from saving the Gulf of Mexico to bringing peace to Afghanistan to delivering health care. Such solutions emerge from a healthy marketplace of ideas, sustained by a populace constantly contributing original ideas and receptive to the ideas of others.”

One possible approach to this reputed decline in creativity is to explicitly teach creative thinking in school. Write to your school board explaining what you mean by creativity and arguing for or against the creation of a class in creativity.

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8. For centuries, prominent thinkers have pondered the relationship between ownership and the development of self (identity), ultimately asking the question, “What does it mean to own something?”

Plato argues that owning objects is detrimental to a person’s character. Aristotle claims that ownership of tangible goods helps to develop moral character. Twentieth-century philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre proposes that ownership extends beyond objects to include intangible things as well. In Sartre’s view, becoming proficient in some skill and knowing something thoroughly means that we “own” it.

Think about the differing views of ownership. Then write an essay in which you explain your position on the relationship between ownership and sense of self. Use appropriate evidence from your reading, experience, or observations to support your argument.

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9. Consider the distinct perspectives expressed in the following statements.

If you develop the absolute sense of certainty that powerful beliefs provide, then you can get yourself to accomplish virtually anything, including those things that other people are certain are impossible.

William Lyon Phelps, American educator, journalist, and professor (1865–1943)

I think we ought always to entertain our opinions with some measure of doubt. I shouldn’t wish people dogmatically to believe any philosophy, not even mine.

Bertrand Russell, British author, mathematician, and philosopher (1872–1970)

In a well-organized essay, take a position on the relationship between certainty and doubt. Support your argument with appropriate evidence and examples.

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10. The following passage is from *Rights of Man*, a book written by the pamphleteer Thomas Paine in 1791. Born in England, Paine was an intellectual, a revolutionary, and a supporter of American independence from England. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay that examines the extent to which Paine's characterization of America holds true today. Use appropriate evidence to support your argument.

If there is a country in the world, where concord, according to common calculation, would be least expected, it is America. Made up, as it is, of people from different nations, accustomed to different forms and habits of government, speaking different languages, and more different in their modes of worship, it would appear that the union of such a people was impracticable; but by the simple operation of constructing government on the principles of society and the rights of man, every difficulty retires, and all the parts are brought into cordial unison. There, the poor are not oppressed, the rich are not privileged. . . . Their taxes are few, because their government is just; and as there is nothing to render them wretched, there is nothing to engender riots and tumults.

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