

Eliminating the Distractor

Duration

One class session of approximately 40 minutes

Resources

1. Study Guide



2. Teacher Handout



3. Student Handout



Objectives of Lesson

- To learn how to identify the distractor in order to choose the correct multiple-choice answer

College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- RHS 1.B:** “Explain how an argument demonstrates understanding of an audience’s beliefs, values, or needs.” (pp. 19, 20, 22, 31, 37, 73, 92)
- CLE 3.A:** “Identify and explain claims and evidence within argument.” (pp. 19, 20, 21, 22, 32, 37, 43, 61)
- REO 5.A:** “Describe the line of reasoning and explain whether it supports an argument’s overarching thesis.” (pp. 19, 20, 44, 55)

Activities

- Completing a multiple-choice practice passage

How to Use This Lesson Plan

This lesson is designed to be use as an introduction to the multiple-choice questions, or it could be used as a review. It is effective because all but two answer choices have been eliminated: the distractor and the correct answer. Students may work in small groups or independently to analyze the two choices, determining the most accurate one. This lesson also requires students to create short justifications—incorporating textual evidence to support the correct as well.

NOTES

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LESSON: ELIMINATING THE DISTRACTOR

Analyzing the Passage

To begin, students will need to analyze the passage. To help students monitor their time, you could set a time limit on the reading of the passage (5 minutes, perhaps). However, if this activity is one of the first multiple choice lessons they have completed, we recommend that you give them as much time as needed. To further scaffold this activity, you may recommend that students review the questions before they read the passage. This could focus their reading, helping them become more efficient on the multiple-choice exam.

Eliminating the Distractor

When discussing multiple choice answer choices, there is a method to the madness of College Board, and this is truly what makes the multiple-choice section of the exam so difficult. Often, students are distracted by . . . the distractor. This is an answer that is technically correct but does not serve as the best answer for the question.

For example, the question may be something like

In Sentence 1, the writer states that “his dad is a bear in the morning.” This rhetorical choice is best labeled as:

- (A) Figurative Language
- (B) Metaphor

The correct answer is B; however, A is “technically correct.” Students may read choice A, determine that it is correct, and move on to the next question. Instead, encourage students to identify the two choices that are correct and closely analyze if one is an extension or deeper analysis of the other. If so, that choice is the correct answer.

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The Multiple-Choice Section

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Questions about Rhetorical Situation

- Understanding diction is essential to doing well in AP® English Language. Sure, diction in the literal sense may simply be the “distinctive vocabulary choices and style of expression” an author/speaker uses. But truthfully, there are layers and stages to what diction is and how good writers use it.
- These questions require readers to:
 - Identify and describe components of the rhetorical situation: the exigence, audience, writer, purpose, context, and message.
 - Explain how an argument demonstrates understanding of an audience’s beliefs, values, or needs.
 - Demonstrate an understanding of an audience’s beliefs, values, or needs.

Questions about Claims and Evidence

- These questions require readers to:
 - Identify and explain claims and evidence within an argument.
 - Identify and describe the overarching thesis of an argument, and any indication it provides of the argument’s structure.
 - Explain ways claims are qualified through modifiers, counterarguments, and alternative perspectives.
 - Develop a paragraph that includes a claim and evidence supporting the claim.
 - Write a thesis statement that requires proof or defense that may preview the structure of the argument.
 - Qualify a claim using modifiers, counterarguments, or alternative perspectives.

The multiple-choice section of the AP® English Language exam counts for 45 percent (just under half of your total AP® score). It looks a *lot* like a reading comprehension test, and can be prepared for in part by improving your reading comprehension skills. Bear in mind though, that the second half of the questions will actually be testing your writing skills—or your ability to ‘read like a writer.’

Rhetorical Situation Questions may look like:

- The author’s primary purpose is to...
- The author’s reference/allusion to “___” serves primarily to...
- In the fourth paragraph, the author includes a quotation by Einstein primarily to?
- The primary audience of the piece could be described as...

Claims and Evidence questions may look like:

- Should the writer make this addition?
- Which of the following best describes the author’s exigence in the passage?
- Which of the following best summarizes the author’s thesis?

Questions about Reasoning and Organization

- These questions require readers to:
 - Describe the line of reasoning and explain whether it supports an argument’s overarching thesis.
 - Explain how the organization of a text creates unity and coherence and reflects a line of reasoning.
 - Recognize and explain the use of methods of development to accomplish a purpose.
 - Develop a line of reasoning and commentary that explains it throughout an argument.
 - Use transitional elements to guide the reader through the line of reasoning of an argument.
 - Use appropriate methods of development to advance an argument.

Reasoning and Organization questions may look like:

- A central contrast in the passage is that between...
- In the fifth paragraph, the author discusses a definition of ... primarily to ...
- The author uses a series of questions in the eighth paragraph to express her ...

Questions about Style

- These questions require readers to:
 - Explain how the word choice, comparisons, and syntax contribute to the specific tone or style of a text.
 - Explain how writers create, combine, and place independent and dependent clauses to show relationships between and among ideas.
 - Explain how grammar and mechanics contribute to the clarity and effectiveness of an argument.
 - Strategically use words, comparisons, and syntax to convey a specific tone or style in an argument.
 - Write sentences that clearly convey ideas and arguments.
 - Use established conventions of grammar and mechanics to communicate clearly and effectively.

Style questions may look like:

- A central irony of the passage is that the author ...
- In the sentence in the middle of the fourth paragraph (“...”), the author’s arrangement of clauses emphasizes ...
- The author’s use of the word “...” (paragraph __, sentence __) conveys her tone of ...

Types of Wrong Answers

The test writers are not terribly creative when it comes to writing wrong answers—they follow the same patterns over and over again.

TOO LITERAL	These answer choices use a very literal definition of a word that appears in the passage that is not the proper meaning of the word in the context of the passage. Avoid these answers by paying attention to the context of ideas in the passage, not just the meanings you associate with individual words.
RECYCLED LANGUAGE	These answer choices repeat words or phrases directly from the passage, but the <i>idea</i> in the answer choice does not match the idea expressed in the passage. These answer choices are tempting because they <i>look</i> like they're talking about the same thing the passage is talking about. Avoid them by matching the ideas in the answers to the ideas in the passage, instead of matching individual words or phrases.
PARTLY TRUE	These answer choices look very much like they refer to the same ideas that the passage does, but there is some detail that doesn't match. It's often the second part of the answer choice that contradicts or misrepresents the passage, so the way to avoid these is to read the <i>entire</i> answer choice carefully. One descriptive word can make an entire answer incorrect.
EXTREME LANGUAGE	Strong words in an answer choice, like first, always, never, must, and only should make you suspicious. They aren't always wrong, but they often are. Before choosing such an answer, make sure that there aren't any exceptions that could apply to an absolute claim. The correct answer is often vague and imprecise.

Tips for the Multiple Choice Exam:

Before:

- Practice reading from various time periods and cultures.
- Review common grammar terms, especially sentence types.
- Review literary and rhetorical terms.

During:

- Be Confident.
- Read through the entire passage after scanning the first few questions to get a sense of what it is about.
- You will read two passage that will include rhetorical analysis questions and three passages that will include writing composition questions.
- Use the process of elimination. Eliminating even one answer will give you a better chance.
- Often, of the five answers choices, there will be:
 - One that is obviously wrong
 - Two that are partially correct
 - One that is technically correct
 - One that is the *most* correct

Eliminating the Distractor

For this activity, the answer options have been narrowed to two: the distractor and the correct answer. Choose the correct answer, and defend your choice using evidence from the text.

The following passage is excerpted from a recent book on education.

I can date my sense that something was going badly wrong in my own teaching to a particular event. It took place on evaluation day in a class I was giving
Line on the works of Sigmund Freud. The class met twice
 5 a week, late in the afternoon, and the students, about fifty undergraduates, tended to drag in and slump, looking slightly disconsolate, waiting for a jump start. To get the discussion moving, I often provided a joke, an anecdote, an amusing query. When you were
 10 a child, I had asked a few weeks before, were your Halloween costumes id costumes, superego costumes, or ego costumes? Were you monsters—creatures from the black lagoon, vampires, and werewolves? Were you Wonder Women and Supermen? Or were you
 15 something in between? It often took this sort of thing to raise them from the habitual torpor.

But today, evaluation day, they were full of life. As I passed out the assessment forms, a buzz rose up in the room. Today they were writing their course evaluations;
 20 their evaluations of Freud, their evaluations of me. They were pitched into high gear. As I hurried from the room, I looked over my shoulder to see them scribbling away like the devil's auditors. They were writing furiously, even the ones who struggled to squeeze out their papers
 25 and journal entries word by word.

But why was I distressed, bolting out the door of my classroom, where I usually held easy sway? Chances were that the evaluations would be much like what they had been in the past: they'd be just fine. And in fact,
 30 they were. I was commended for being "interesting," and complimented for my relaxed and tolerant ways; my sense of humor and capacity to connect the material we were studying with contemporary culture came in for praise.

In many ways, I was grateful for the evaluations, as I always had been, just as I'm grateful for the chance to teach in an excellent university surrounded everywhere with very bright people. But as I ran from that classroom, full of anxious intimations, and then
 40 later as I sat to read the reports, I began to feel that there was something wrong. There was an undercurrent to the whole process I didn't like. I was disturbed by the evaluation forms themselves with their number ratings ("What is your ranking of the instructor?—1, 2, 3, 4,
 45 or 5"), which called to mind the sheets they circulate after a TV pilot plays to the test audience in Burbank.

Nor did I like the image of myself that emerged—a figure of learned but humorous detachment, laid-back, easygoing, cool. But most of all, I was disturbed by
 50 the attitude of calm consumer expertise that pervaded the responses. I was put off by the serenely implicit belief that the function of Freud—or, as I'd seen it expressed on other forms, in other classes, the function of Shakespeare, of Wordsworth or of Blake—was
 55 diversion and entertainment. "Edmundson has done a fantastic job," said one reviewer, "of presenting this difficult, important & controversial material in an enjoyable and approachable way."

Enjoyable: I enjoyed the teacher. I enjoyed the
 60 reading. Enjoyed the course. It was pleasurable, diverting, part of the culture of readily accessible, manufactured bliss: the culture of Total Entertainment All the Time.

As I read the reviews, I thought of a story I'd heard
 65 about a Columbia University instructor who issued a two-part question at the end of his literature course. Part one: What book in the course did you most dislike? Part two: What flaws of intellect or character does that dislike point up in you? The hand that framed those
 70 questions may have been slightly heavy. But at least they compelled the students to see intellectual work as a confrontation between two people, reader and author, where the stakes mattered. A form of media connoisseurship was what my students took as their
 75 natural right.

But why exactly were they describing the Oedipus complex and the death drive* as interesting and enjoyable to contemplate? Why were they staring into the abyss, as Lionel Trilling once described his own
 80 students as having done, and commending it for being a singularly dark and fascinatingly contoured abyss, one sure to survive as an object of edifying contemplation for years to come? Why is the great confrontation—the rugged battle of fate where strength is born, to recall
 85 Emerson—so conspicuously missing? Why hadn't anyone been changed by my course?

* The Oedipus complex and the death drive are concepts from Freudian psychoanalytic theory that are used to explain self-destructive behavior, among other things.

1. The author’s tone in the statement “It often took this sort of thing to raise them from the habitual torpor” (first paragraph, last sentence) can best be described as
 - (A) frustrated
 - (B) outraged
 2. In the first paragraph (“I can...torpor”), the author primarily implies that his students
 - (A) can’t concentrate late in the day
 - (B) enjoy his attempts to amuse them
 3. In the second paragraph, fifth sentence, the author uses the term “devil’s auditors” to refer to
 - (A) fascination
 - (B) industriousness
 4. In the second paragraph, last sentence (“They were...word”), the author’s primary purpose is to
 - (A) note the irony of how easily his students wrote evaluations
 - (B) praise the efforts of his students
 5. Which statement provides the best rhetorical analysis of the first sentence of the fourth paragraph (“In many...people”)?
 - (A) The author addresses potential objections to his argument by indicating what he is “grateful” for before making his main point.
 - (B) The author expresses a sense of superiority by describing the “excellent university” where he teaches.
 6. Why does the author mention a TV pilot in Burbank in the fourth paragraph, fourth sentence (“which called...Burbank”) ?
 - (A) To argue that the entertainment value of a class is too often overlooked
 - (B) To question whether an evaluation is effective
- ① Both “frustrated” and “outraged” are negative, but there is no indication of anger on the part of the author, so eliminate (B). The correct answer is (A).
 - ② Although the students needed “a jump start” when the class met, “late in the afternoon,” the author also says that his amusing anecdotes served “To get the discussion moving” and “to raise [the students] from the habitual torpor.” This implies both that the students could concentrate and that they responded well to the amusing remarks, so eliminate (A). The correct answer is (B).
 - ③ While it is possible that the students were “writing furiously” out of “fascination,” there is not direct support for that idea in the paragraph; eliminate (A). “Writing furiously” does match the idea of “industriousness,” so the correct answer is (B).
 - ④ The author only notes how easily his students were writing; he does not pass judgement on them, so eliminate (B). The contrast between the ease with which the students wrote and “the ones who struggled to squeeze out their papers and journal entries” is somewhat ironic, so the correct answer is (A).
 - ⑤ The reference to the “excellent university” where the author teaches is part of his expression of gratitude, not “a sense of superiority,” so eliminate (B). The first sentence does not express the main point of the paragraph, which is more focused on the idea in the second sentence “that there was something wrong,” and his expression of gratitude can be interpreted as a response to the potential objection that he does not appreciate his position, so the correct answer is (A).
 - ⑥ He also does not like the notion that the students view his class as entertainment, so eliminate (A). The main point of the paragraph is that the author is uncomfortable with the evaluation system, so the correct answer is (B).

7. In the fourth paragraph, the author suggests that “the function of Freud” (seventh sentence)
- (A) should never be presented in an enjoyable way
 - (B) is not fully grasped by his students
8. Based on the author’s views at the end of the fourth paragraph (“But most...way”), the students filling out the evaluations would most likely respond to a thought-provoking article on a controversial topic by
- (A) growing further inured to the suffering of others
 - (B) evaluating it based on its perceived entertainment value
9. At the end of the fifth paragraph (“Enjoyable: I... Time”), the author suggests that his students
- (A) expect to be entertained
 - (B) enjoy most things in life
10. In the sixth paragraph (“As I...right.”), the author discusses the Columbia University instructor’s questions in order to
- (A) imply that one cannot learn from a book unless it isn’t enjoyable
 - (B) provide a counter-example of how students might react to difficult materials
- ⑦ The quoted student also says that the author presented the class material “in an enjoyable...way,” and the author specifically objects to the view of Freud as “diversion and entertainment,” but he does not go so far as to say that Freud “should never be presented in an enjoyable way”; eliminate (A). The author disagrees with the “belief that the function of Freud...was diversion and entertainment,” which supports the idea that he believes the function “is not fully grasped by his students,” so the correct answer is (B).
- ⑧ Becoming “inured” to something means becoming accustomed to it; as there is no discussion of this idea in the fourth paragraph, eliminate (A). The author does discuss the students’ focus on the “entertainment value” of their classes, so the correct answer is (B).
- ⑨ Although the author mentions a broader “culture of readily accessible, manufactured bliss” that goes beyond just his classes, he frames this viewpoint as the one from which students evaluate everything, which does not necessarily mean that they actually “enjoy most things in life,” but rather than they evaluate things based on whether they are enjoyable. Eliminate (A). That the students “expect to be entertained” matches this viewpoint that the author describes, so the correct answer is (B).
- ⑩ The questions cited ask students to think about what their “dislike” of a book might say about them, which is something one might “learn” from a book one disliked, so eliminate (A). The questions cited are different from the ones asked on the student evaluations discussed earlier in the passage, and the idea of approaching “intellectual works as a confrontation between two people, reader and author” is quite different from the concept of entertainment or enjoyment that the author discusses in the previous paragraph as the way his students approach most things, so the correct answer is (B).

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①

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②

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③

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⑥

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