

AP Seminar – Summer Research and Writing Task

One of the foundational skills necessary to succeed in AP Seminar—and in the larger landscape of critical reading, writing, and thinking—is the purposeful analysis of other people’s ideas. In this assignment, you will select and analyze writings about current events to practice effective critical analysis.

FIRST,

Choose five to seven articles or op-ed pieces, each from a different publication and each focused on a different topic. Read and annotate¹ each of these readings.

THEN,

For each piece:

1. Provide the title, author, and source of publication for the piece.
2. Write a brief summary of the piece (150-200 words).
3. Identify the argument, main idea, or thesis² of the piece (one complete sentence).
4. What are some of the **strengths and weaknesses**³ of this piece (150-200 words)?
5. What perspectives are represented by this piece and how do you know? Who is not represented who should be (150-200 words)?
6. **MVP**: What is the **most valuable part/passage** of the article? Why? (quote the passage, explain in 75-100 words).

FINALLY,

Collect all of your responses in one place and be ready to share your work with your AP Seminar teacher. Your work will inform your first two weeks of school; the more complete this work is at the beginning of the semester, the more time and energy you’ll have to focus on our next moves with these meaningful analyses!

1. See [this article](#) from UNC Chapel Hill about annotation. You can print the article and write directly on it, or you can save the article as a PDF and mark it up in Microsoft Edge, Adobe Reader, or similar program.
2. For the purposes of AP Seminar, these are all the same thing; terminology is less important than concept.
3. There’s way more than one right response here; see the example for some suggestions.

Confused on where to start?
Want/need an example?

Here's an example of what one of your responses could look like.

[Click here for example article](#)

1. "How a little more silence in children's lives helps them grow" by LA Johnson, published by NPR.
2. The article opens by taking the reader on a journey through Lee Montessori, in Washington D.C. A teacher there uses silence to get his students to concentrate on what they're doing. The author explains how silence is getting increasingly harder to find, and how our brain must work overtime to ignore sounds. Johnson argues that when we hear numerous noises, our ear and brain must decipher what is important and what can be ignored; this can lead to mental and physical fatigue. The article then goes on to explain that noise is especially distracting to young brains and how it takes a lot of brainpower to ignore sounds. Elliot, a researcher at LSU, discusses studies that they've conducted where students are assessed on their ability to comprehend or memorize things when various sounds/noises are being played. The article then suggests that although there is little research to support this, using white noise might be helpful for focus. Johnson concludes the article by challenging the readers to get cozy with the sounds of silence, since there are so many cognitive, mental, and physical benefits to surrendering to quiet.
3. Johnson's article argues that understanding how noise affects us is critical because noise impacts our ability to focus and learn; the article challenges the readers (although it will be difficult) to embrace silence and enjoy the benefits of the absence of noise.
4. This article is very accessible to all audiences; no background knowledge is needed to understand the arguments made in the article, or the many studies cited in the article. Johnson labels (signposts) each of the sections of the articles so the audience can clearly understand the purpose and central idea of each section. Each new section clearly builds on the next, making the article (and argument) easy to follow. Johnson also included many visuals in the article – some were abstract artistic representations mentioned in the article, some were artistic drawings/labeling of the ear (and how it's affected by sound). Weaknesses of the article include specifics of the sources/studies used in the article. The audience doesn't include much information for each sited study, so it's hard for the audience to determine the credibility of Johnson's included evidence. One study done in the 1970's is mentioned, and although the findings of that study are interesting and help support her argument, it would be more beneficial to have a more recent study cited in this article. Education has changed tremendously in since the 70's, and having more up-to-date studies, with more relevant evidence to support this argument would make Johnson's article more impactful.

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5. Johnson interviews a teacher (Mr. Mejía-Menendez) about the noise level in his classroom. Because Johnson's article specifically talks about noise and the ability to focus, memorize, and comprehend, having a teacher's perspective is vital to the article. Noticeably absent from this part of the article is the perspective of students. Hearing directly from students would have greatly impacted this argument. Johnson then includes quotes from a neurobiologist named Kraus, who also wrote a book called *Of Sound Mind*. Including Kraus' input was extremely important because findings from her book provided credibility to the claims Johnson was making about how noise shapes our brains. Emily Elliot, a psychology professor at LSU, is also included, specifically because of a study she performed on how auditory distraction affects a young child's ability to perform serial recall tasks. Although Elliot's inclusion in this article provided great insight and credibility, it would have been impactful to also hear from students who took part in this study – what did they experience? What surprised them? Did participating in this study shape/change your thinking about noise? If so, how?

6. The most valuable passage from this article comes from the last section of the article. "Creating enough quiet to help hear meaningful sound is easier said than done. Some blame, in part, a culture that promotes constant stimulus." The idea that we, as humans, must work so hard to create a space and time where we can intentionally hear "meaningful sound" is really difficult. This doesn't mean music, or white noise, or manufactured nature sounds. It means truly unplugging and getting away from noise all together. Because our life is so loud and we're constantly consumed with noise, we have to actively seek opportunities to sit in silence – something that makes many of us (myself included) uncomfortable. I really resonated with this passage because it makes me consider how often my day is consumed with noise and what percentage of my day is totally without sound. The second part of the quote challenges us to consider that we have been culturally programmed to be constantly stimulated, and although we're somewhat used to it, there is scientific evidence that it's harmful to our mental, cognitive, and physical health.

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