The village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call "out there." Some seventy miles east of the Colorado border, the countryside, with its hard blue skies and desert-clear air, has an atmosphere that is rather more Far Western than Middle West. The local accent is Barbed with a prairie twang, a ranch-hand nasality, and the men, many of them, wear narrow frontier trousers, Stetsons, and high-heeled boots with pointed toes. The land is flat, and the views are awesomely extensive; horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them.

Holcomb, too, can be seen from great distances. Not that there is much to see—simply an aimless congregation of buildings divided in the center by the main-line tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad, a haphazard hamlet bounded on the south by a brown stretch of the Arkansas (pronounced "Ar-kan-sas") River, on the north by a highway, Route 50, and on the east and west by prairie lands and wheat fields. After rain, or when snowfalls thaw, the streets, unnamed, unshaded, unpaved, turn from the thickest dust into the direst mud. At one end of the town stands a stark old stucco structure, the roof of which supports an electric sign—Dance—but the dancing has ceased and the advertisement has been dark for several years. Nearby is another building with an irrelevant sign, this one in flaking gold on a dirty window—HOLCOMB BANK. The bank closed in 1933, and it is one of the town’s two “apartment houses,” the second being a ramshackle mansion known, because a good part of the local school’s faculty lives there, as the Teacherage. But the majority of Holcomb’s homes are one-story frame affairs, with front porches.
Developing the Opening Paragraph

Now that you have read, and after you have marked your passage, review the prompt. Now, choose the elements you are able to identify and analyze those that support Capote's view. To demonstrate, we have chosen structure, tone, and selection of detail.

Now, it's time to write. Your opening statement is the one that catches the eye of the reader and sets the expectation and tone of your essay. Spend time on your first paragraph to maximize your score. A suggested approach is to relate a direct reference from the passage to the topic. Make certain that the topic is very clear to the reader. This re enforces the idea that you fully understand what is expected of you and what you will communicate to the reader. As always, identify both the text and its author in this first paragraph.

Now, you try it. Write your own first paragraph for this prompt. Write quickly, referring to your notes. Let's check what you've written:
• Have you included author, title?
• Have you addressed "Capote's view of Holcomb"?
• Have you specifically mentioned the elements you will refer to in your essay?

Here are four sample opening paragraphs that address each of the above criteria:

A

In the opening of *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote presents a picture of the town of Holcomb, Kansas. Through structure, selection of detail, and a detached tone, he makes it clear that he views Holcomb as dull and ordinary.

B

Holcomb, Kansas. Holcomb, Kansas. Even the sound of the place is boring and uninteresting. Moreover, Truman Capote seems to agree with this in his opening to *In Cold Blood*. I, too, would be inclined to pass by this sleepy, bland, and undistinguished hamlet. This view is developed through the author's tone, structure, and selection of detail.

C

"Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Sante Fe tracks, drama in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped here." This is the town of Holcomb, Kansas. Using a reportorial tone, specific structure, and selection of detail, Capote introduces the reader to this unremarkable town in the opening of *In Cold Blood*.

D

*In Cold Blood* is a very appropriate title, because Capote presents a cold and unemotional view of Holcomb, Kansas. His tone, structure, and selection of detail create a distant and detached picture of this desolate farm community.

Each of these opening paragraphs is an acceptable beginning to this AP English Language and Composition exam essay. Look at what each of the paragraphs has in common:

• Each has identified the title and author.
• Each has stated which stylistic elements will be used.
• Each has stated the purpose of analyzing these elements.

However, observe what is different about the opening paragraphs.

• **Sample A** restates the question without elaborating. It is to the point and correct, but it does not really pique the reader's interest. (Use this type of opening if you feel unsure or uncomfortable with the prompt.)
• **Sample B** reflects a writer who really has a voice. He or she has already determined Capote's view and indicates that he or she understands how this view is created.
• **Sample C** immediately places the reader into the passage by referring specifically to it.
Sample D reveals a mature, confident writer who is unafraid to make his or her own voice heard.

Note: There are many other types of opening paragraphs that could also do the job. Into which of the above samples could your opening paragraph be classified?

Writing the Body of the Essay

What Should I Include in the Body of This Analysis Essay?

1. Obviously, this is where you present your analysis and the points you want to make that are related to the prompt.
2. Adhere to the question.
3. Use specific references and details from the passage.
   - Don't always paraphrase the original. Refer directly to it.
   - Place quotation marks around those words/phrases you extract from the passage.
4. Use "connective tissue" in your essay to establish adherence to the question.
   - Use the repetition of key ideas in the prompt and in your opening paragraph.
   - Try using "echo words" (that is, synonyms: town/village/hamlet; bland/ordinary/undistinguished)
   - Use transitions between paragraphs (see Chapter 8).

To understand the process, carefully read the sample paragraphs below. Each develops one of the elements asked for in the prompt. Notice the specific references and the "connective tissue."
Details that do not apply to the prompt are ignored.

A

This paragraph develops tone.

Throughout the passage, Capote maintains a tone that resembles a detached reporter who is an observer of a scene. Although the impact of the passage is seeing Holcomb in a less than positive light, the author rarely uses judgmental terminology or statements. In describing the town, he uses words such as "float," "haphazard," "unnamed," "unshaded," "unpaved." Individuals are painted with an objective brush showing them in "denim," "Stetsons," and "cowboy boots." Capote maintains his panning camera angle when he writes of the buildings and the surrounding farmland. This matter-of-fact approach is slightly altered when he begins to portray the townspeople as a whole when he uses such words as "prosperous people," "comfortable interiors," and "have done well." His objective tone, interestingly enough, does exactly what he says the folks of Holcomb do. He "camouflages" his attitude toward the reality of the place and time.

B

This paragraph develops structure.

Capote organizes his passage spatially. He brings his reader from "great distances" to the periphery of the village with its borders of "main-line tracks" and roads, river and fields, to the
heart of the town and its "unnamed, unshaded and unpaved streets." As the reader journeys through the stark village, he or she is led eventually from the outskirts to the town's seemingly one bright spot—the prosperous Holcomb school. Capote develops our interest in the school by contrasting it with the bleak and lonely aspects of the first three paragraphs. He shifts our view with the word "unless" and focuses on the positive aspects of the town. Holcomb "has done well" despite its forbidding description. The passage could end now, except that Capote chooses to develop his next paragraph with the words, "until one morning," thus taking the reader on another journey, one of foreshadowing and implication. Something other than wheat is on the horizon.

This paragraph develops selection of **detail**.

In selecting his details, Capote presents a multilayered Holcomb, Kansas. The town is first presented as stark and ordinary. It is a "lonesome area" with "hard blue skies," where "the land is flat" and the buildings are an "aimless congregation." The ordinary qualities of the village are reinforced by his references to the "unnamed" streets, "onestory frame houses" and the fact that "celebrated expresses never pause there" (i.e., the "Super Chief, Chief, and El Capitan"). Details portray the citizens of Holcomb in the same light. Ranch hands speak with "barbed" and nasal "twangs." They wear the stereotypical "cowboy" uniform and so does the "gaunt" post mistress in her "rawhide jacket." Once this description is established, the author contrasts it with an unexpected view of the town. He now deals with the appearance of Holcomb's "camouflages," the "modern" school, the "prosperous people," the "comfortable interiors" and the "swollen grain elevators." If Capote chooses to illuminate this contrast, does it indicate more to come?

We urge you to spend more time developing the body paragraphs rather than worrying about a concluding paragraph, especially one beginning with "In conclusion," or "In summary." To be honest, in such a brief essay, the reader can remember what you have already stated. It is not necessary to repeat yourself in a summary final paragraph.

If you want to make a final statement, try to link your ideas to a particularly effective line or image from the passage. (It's a good thing.)
DO THIS NOW.

Write the body of your essay. Time yourself. You only have about 40 minutes to read, notate, formulate and write your essay during the test.

When you write the body of your essay, take only 15–20 minutes.

Find a way to time yourself, and try your best to finish within that time frame.

Because this is practice, don't panic if you can't complete your essay within the given 20 minutes. You will become more and more comfortable with the tasks presented to you as you gain more experience with this type of question.

NOTE: Sharing your writing with members of your class or study group will allow you and all of the participants to gain more experience and more of a comfort zone with requirements and possibilities.

READ ACTUAL EXEMPLAR ESSAYS:

After reading the paragraphs from the opening of Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood (above). You were provided this prompt by which to develop an ANALYTICAL ESSAY.

After carefully reading the excerpt, write a well-organized essay in which you characterize Capote’s view of Holcomb, Kansas, and analyze how Capote conveys this view. Your analysis may consider such stylistic elements as diction, imagery, syntax, structure, tone, and selection of detail.

Here are two actual student essays with comments on each.

Student Sample A (see the rubric here X)

Truly successful authors have the ability to convey their view of a place without actually saying it, to portray a landscape in a certain light simply by describing it. In the provided excerpt taken from the opening paragraphs of In Cold Blood, Truman Capote does just this. Through his use of stylistic elements such as selection of detail, imagery, and figurative language, Capote reveals his own solemn and mysterious view of Holcomb, Kansas, while setting the stage for an imminent change.

Beginning in the first line of the passage, Capote selects the most boring details of life in the small town in order to portray its solemnity. He draws attention to the physical isolation of Holcomb by referring to it as the place that "other Kansans call 'out there.'" In addition, he speaks of the parameters of the small town, pointing out that it is enclosed on all sides by rivers, prairies, and wheat fields. He describes the town as remote and unaffected, desolate and boring, continually mentioning the old, peeling paint and "irrelevant signs" that dot the landscape. Capote also gives the village a feeling of laziness in his writing, describing it as an "aimless congregation of buildings" and a "haphazard hamlet." He obviously feels that the town lacks liveliness, that it is bland and unchanging, simple and average. Almost looking down on the village and its inhabitants, the author characterizes the people in broad categories and focuses on their outward appearances and superficial similarities instead of delving more deeply into their...
abilities or livelihoods. This reveals that he views the people and their surroundings as onedimensional and simplistic. The idea that he may summarize an entire town, generalize about its people and not be far from the truth, contributes greatly to Capote's solemn view of Holcomb. One gets the feelings from the author's selection of detail that he wishes there was something more interesting, deeper, to share with his audience, and is disappointed by the cursory nature in which he must approach the description of such a melancholy place.

In addition to including the most boring of details, Capote uses a great deal of imagery to describe the town and its residents. Focusing mostly on visual appeal, he describes the "sulphur-colored paint" and "flaking gold" to reveal the town's atrophying appearance and has-been status. Portraying the area as one that has seen better days, Capote writes about the "old stucco structure" that no longer holds dances, the crumbling post office, and the bank that now fails to serve its original purpose. Combining visual imagery with hints of desolation and obsoleteness, Capote attempts to reveal the gray and boring nature of the town through its appearance. He does not, however, rely only on visual details; in describing the local accent as "barbed with a prairie twang," he uses both auditory and visual appeal to make one imagine a ranch-hand's tone of voice and pattern of speech as he describes the monotonous events of his farming days. The "hard blue skies and desert-clear air" contribute to a feeling of emptiness, an emotional vacancy that seems omnipresent in the small town. Finally, even "the steep and swollen grain elevators" that represent the town's prosperity are seen in a solemn and mysterious light, as Capote makes certain to mention that the townspeople camouflage this abundance without explaining why they choose to do so.

Capote also uses a great deal of figurative language and contrasts to portray the small town as solemn and dead, yet somewhat mysterious. The area's intrigue lies more in its paradoxes than in its appearance, more in what Capote fails to explain than what he discusses. With the simile, "a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples," he almost points toward a happy, prosperous side of the town for the first and perhaps only time in this passage. Not long after this sentence, however, the author describes the streets as "unnamed, unshaded, unpaved," returning to his description of the village as desolate and empty, so destroyed that it is almost primitive.

This is not the only contrast of Capote's opening paragraphs; it seems the entire passage paints the town as quiet and simple only so that it may shock us with what is to come. The author uses personification at the end of the passage, stating that "drama … had never stopped there." The position of these words, just after he discusses the positive aspects of the school and its students' families, results in yet another contrast, another mysterious solemnity. Finally, in the last paragraph of this excerpt, when Capote writes "until one morning … few … had ever heard of Holcomb," the reader becomes aware that the solemn nature of this town is about to change. It becomes clear that the reader has been somewhat set up by Capote, made to view the town in the same way the author does, so that we may then realize the shock of the approaching aberration.

Through his use of stylistic elements, Capote builds the perfect scenery for the setting of a murder, the perfect simple town waiting for a complicated twist, a faded flower or ghost town that has surely seen better days. By the end of the passage, he has already warned the reader that everything he has stated about Holcomb is about to change, that the quiet and solitude, the blandness of the small town, may soon be replaced by very different descriptions.
Student Sample B

Holcomb, Kansas, a village containing two hundred and seventy inhabitants, has skipped over the drama of life, according to Truman Capote. The square town is described spatially with houses, rivers, fields of wheat, stations, a bank, and a school. In Truman Capote's In Cold Blood, an image of the town of Holcomb is presented through precise types of diction, syntax, imagery, and tone.

In order to convey a Western dialect used on Holcomb, Capote refers to the town as, "out there," and addresses the pronunciation of the Arkansas River with an informative, "Ar-kan-sas." Throughout the town there are quite a few signs which transmit the ghostliness present there. For example, "—Dance—but dancing has ceased and the advertisement has been dark for several years," and "HOLCOMB BANK," which is later on discussed as being closed down, demonstrate the vacantness of the town. To create a better concept of the land itself, Capote uses alliterative devices and an allusion when he states, "horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them." This magnifies the fieldlike setting, and some of the town's old remnants of massive buildings. Altogether, the author's utilization of diction devices greatly personifies the town.

Although not a glaring feature of the excerpt, the sentence structure plays an important role in developing the author's viewpoint. He predominantly utilizes compound sentences, and complex with some prepositional phrases. The use of parallel structures such as, "Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Sante Fe tracks ..." greatly adds to the monotony of the town. "(Holcomb, like all the rest of Kansas, is 'dry')." is one of the numerous similes found throughout the passage that create a sense of vacancy within the town.

Capote's use of all of these literary devices envelope the reader into picturing what Holcomb looks like, a worn out, rustic town filled with "grain elevators," or fields and fields of wheat. The reference to the grain and wheat exemplifies the daily activities that occur in the town. After all of the rural descriptions, a vision of the school is given, as it "camouflages" into the mix.

Encompassing all of the author's literary, stylistic approaches, one is able to "hear" a voice or tone in the reading. A feeling of desolation, weariness, and loneliness should be derived from reading about this town, and a sense of rejuvenation is experienced toward the closing of the excerpt due to descriptions of the school. In exemplifying that the town has pride in one area, which is education, it leaves the reader with a sense of hope in the\'town and in its inhabitants. A strong voice toward Holcomb of its rugged, run down, and exhausted institutions is present.

Truman Capote's excerpt from In Cold Blood, which objectively describes Holcomb, a town in Kansas, is profoundly written because of its abundance of allusions, alliteration, imagery, and particular syntax utilized. Capote's detailing enables one to envision what the town looks like because of spatial and in-depth descriptions.
Let's Take a Look at a Set of Rubrics for These Analysis Essays

After you read the sample A and B essay, DETERMINE the range (high/medium/low) for each of the sample essays based on the rubric...

By the way, if you want to see actual AP rubrics as used in a recent AP English Language and Composition exam, log onto the College Board website at www.collegeboard.org/ap.

As you probably know, essays are rated on a 9–1 scale, with 9 being the highest and 1 the lowest. Because we are not there with you to rate your essay personally and to respond to your style and approach, we are going to list the criteria for high-, middle-, and low-range papers. These criteria are based on our experience with rubrics and reading AP Literature essays.

A **HIGH** range essay can be a 9, an 8, or a high-end 7. **MIDDLE** refers to essays in the 7 to 5 range, and the **LOW** scoring essays are rated 4 to 1.

Let's be honest with each other. You and I both can recognize a 9 essay. It sings, and we wish we could have written it. And, it's wonderful that the essays don't all have to sing the same song with the same words and rhythm. Conversely, we can, unfortunately, recognize the 1 or 2 paper, which is off-key; and we are relieved not to have written it.

**High-Range Essay (9, 8, 7)**

- Indicates complete understanding of the prompt
- Integrates the analysis of Capote's view of Holcomb with his tone
- Explores the implications of the contrasts within the excerpt
- Identifies and analyzes stylistic elements, such as imagery, diction, structure, selection of detail
- Cites specific references to the passage
- Illustrates and supports the points being made
- Is clear, well-organized, and coherent
- Reflects the ability to manipulate language at an advanced level
- Contains, if any, only minor errors/flaws

*Note: A 7 essay rated in the high range makes the jump from the middle range because of its more mature style and perception.*

**Mid-Range Essay (7, 6, 5)**

- Refers accurately to the prompt
- Refers accurately to the stylistic elements used by Capote
- Provides a less thorough analysis of the development of Capote's view of Holcomb than the higher-rated paper
- Is less adept at linking techniques to the purpose of the passage
- Demonstrates writing that is adequate to convey the writer's intent
- May not be sensitive to the contrasts in the excerpts and their implications
Note:

- The 7 paper demonstrates a more consistent command of college-level writing than does the 5 or 6 essay.
- A 5 paper does the minimum required by the prompt. It relies on generalizations and sketchy analysis. It is often sidetracked by plot and the references may be limited or simplistic.

Low-Range Essay (4, 3, 2, 1)

- Does not respond adequately to the prompt
- Demonstrates insufficient and/or inaccurate understanding of the passage
- Does not link stylistic elements to Capote's view of Holcomb
- Underdevelops and/or inaccurately analyzes the development of Capote's view of Holcomb
- Fails to demonstrate an understanding of Capote's tone
- Demonstrates weak control of the elements of diction, syntax, and organization

Note:

- A 4 or 3 essay may do no more than paraphrase sections of the passage rather than analyze Capote's view of Holcomb.
- A 2 essay may merely summarize the passage.

(NO MATTER HOW WELL WRITTEN, A SUMMARY CAN NEVER EARN MORE THAN A 2.)

- A 1–2 essay indicates a major lack of understanding and control. It fails to comprehend the prompt and/or the passage. It may also indicate severe writing problems.

Student Essay A: This is a high-range paper for the following reasons:

- It is on task.
- It indicates complete understanding of the prompt and the passage.
- It uses mature diction [paragraph 1: "Capote reveals … imminent change"], [paragraph 2: "Capote also gives … simplistic"], [paragraph 3: "the hard blue skies … to do so"].
- It integrates references to support the thesis of the essay [paragraph 2: "Capote also gives … hamlet"], [paragraph 3: "Focusing … has-been status"], [paragraph 4: "with the simile … passage"].
- It grasps subtleties and implications [paragraph 1: "Capote reveals … change"], [paragraph 2: "One gets … place"], [paragraph 4: "The area's … discusses"], [paragraph 6: "By the end … descriptions"].
- It introduces specifics in a sophisticated manner [paragraph 3: "He does not … farming days"], [paragraph 5: "The author … solemnity"].
- It uses good "connective tissue" [paragraphs 2 and 3: "in addition"], [paragraph 4: "Capote also uses …"], [paragraph 5: "This is not only contrast …"].
- It creates original and insightful comments [paragraph 2: "one gets … melancholy place"], [paragraph 3: "He does not … farming days"].
- It presents a conclusion that introduces unique observations and brings the reader directly to what may follow this passage.

This is a high-range essay that indicates a writer who "gets it"—who clearly understands the passage and the prompt and who can present ideas in a mature, controlled voice.

Student Essay B

This is a mid-range essay for the following reasons:

- It sets up an introduction that indicates the writer's understanding of the prompt.
- It cites appropriate specifics, but often does not adequately integrate these into the analysis [paragraph 2: "In order … present there"], [paragraph 3, sentence 2].
- It uses frequently awkward diction and syntax [first line of paragraph 2], [last sentence of paragraph 2], [all of paragraph 5].
- It demonstrates good topic adherence.
- It reveals a facility with stylistic analysis [paragraph 2: "To create … reaches them"], [paragraph 3, sentence 3].
- It presents a conclusion that does not add anything to the impact of the essay.

This mid-range paper indicates a writer who understands both the prompt and the process of analysis. However, the essay does not address the subtle, underlying purpose of the passage and ignores the foreshadowing and contrast. The writer's frequently awkward and disconnected diction and syntax prevent it from achieving the level of the high-range essays.