

A mood question can be worded like this.

The mood of the second paragraph of the passage is best described as

- (A) quizzical
- (B) elegiac
- (C) whimsical
- (D) suspenseful
- (E) satiric

In literary criticism, the term *mood* refers to the feelings that a poem or prose piece arouses in the reader. Mood, therefore, is technically different from *tone*, which refers to the author's or speaker's feelings about the subject. Considering the foregoing questions, though, this subtle distinction is ignored on the AP exam, where the terms are used more or less interchangeably.

To prepare multiple-choice questions, AP test writers ordinarily choose passages written between the seventeenth and twenty-first century, although they might occasionally toss in a passage from ancient Greece or Rome. In each exam, they attempt to balance genre, time period, and individual style. Passages are non-fiction and are composed by essayists, historians, journalists, diarists, autobiographers, political writers, philosophers, and critics. You won't find simple passages that leave little room for interpretation, nor will you find passages that are so ornate or ambiguous that they invite numerous interpretations.

On the multiple-choice portion of the exam, the authors and titles of the passages are not given. In effect, your sensitivity to the written word is on the line. You will be prepared if you have a great deal of reading experience, both from school and on your own. The kind of close textual analysis usually practiced in AP English classes will help you read the passages and answer the questions.

Sample Passage and Questions

"Do you wiz zo haut can be?"

- That was what the guide asked, when we were looking up at the bronze horses on the Arch of Peace. It meant, Do you wish to go up there? I give it as a specimen of guide-English. These are the people that make life a burden to the tourist. Their tongues are never still. They talk forever and forever, and that is the kind of billingsgate they use. Inspiration itself could hardly comprehend them. If they would only show you a masterpiece of art, or a venerable tomb, or a prison-house, or a battlefield, hallowed by touching memories, or historical reminiscences,
- (10) or grand traditions, and then step aside and hold still for ten minutes and let you think, it would not be so bad. But they interrupt every dream, every pleasant train of thought, with their tiresome cackling. Sometimes when I have been standing before some cherished old idol of mine that I remembered years and years ago in pictures in the geography at school, I
- (15) have thought I would give a whole world if the human parrot at my side would suddenly perish where he stood and leave me gaze, and ponder, and worship.

No, we did not "wiz zo haut can be." We wished to go to La Scala, the largest theater in the world, I think they call it. We did so. It was

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- (20) a large place. Seven separate and distinct masses of humanity—six great circles and a monster parquette.¹

We wished to go to the Ambrosian Library, and we did that also.

We saw a manuscript of Virgil, with annotations in the handwriting of Petrarch, the gentleman who loved another man's Laura, and lavished

- (25) upon her all through life a love which was clear waste of the raw material. It was sound sentiment, but bad judgment. It brought both parties fame, and created a fountain of commiseration for them in sentimental breasts that is running yet. But who says a word in behalf of poor Mr. Laura? (I do not know his other name.) Who glorifies him? Who bedews him
- (30) with tears? Who writes poetry about him? Nobody. How do you suppose *he* liked the state of things that has given the world so much pleasure? How did he enjoy having another man following his wife everywhere and making her name a familiar word in every garlic-exterminating mouth in Italy with his sonnets to her preempted eyebrows? *They* got
- (35) fame and sympathy—he got neither. This is a peculiarly felicitous instance of what is called poetical justice. It is all very fine; but it does not chime with my notions of right. It is too one-sided—too ungenerous. Let the world go on fretting about Laura and Petrarch if it will; but as for me, my tears and lamentations shall be lavished upon the unsung defendant.

¹the lowest floor of a theater; the orchestra section

1. The opening sentence of the first main paragraph (lines 2–3) contains all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) a proper noun
 - (B) a transitional word or phrase
 - (C) a dependent clause
 - (D) prepositional phrases
 - (E) parallelism

Comment: This is one of a relatively small percent of questions on the exam that pertain to the grammatical components of a sentence. To answer the question successfully you need to be familiar with sentence structure and with the concepts and terminology of traditional grammar.

In order to find the answer, you must examine the sentence, looking for the features listed in the five choices. The one feature that does not appear is the correct answer. (In any set of AP exam questions you are apt to find two or three items that ask you to identify the exception or to name which of several choices apply—as in questions 2 and 6 that follow.)

Choice (A) is not a good choice because the “Arch of Peace” is a proper noun. Choice (B) may seem like a possible answer because the sentence in question does not contain any of the common transitional words or phrases found in English. However, the word “That” functions as a transition, linking this sentence to the quotation with which the passage began. Because the sentence contains a subordinate clause (“when we were looking . . .”), Choice (C) is not a correct response. Nor is Choice (D) a valid answer because the sentence contains two prepositional phrases: “at the bronze horses” and “on the Arch of Peace.” By the process of elimination, then, Choice (E) is the correct answer.

2. In line 12, the word “cackling” derives its effect from
- I. its use as a description of human speech
 - II. its position as the last word in the sentence
 - III. the sound of the word
- (A) I only
 (B) I and II only
 (C) I and III only
 (D) II and III only
 (E) I, II, and III

Comment: By singling out the word “cackling,” the question implies that readers will find the word unusual in some way. Your job is to determine what gives the word its power in this particular context. It goes without saying that chickens, turkeys, and other fowl are known to cackle—not humans. Therefore, Roman numeral I is a good choice.

What about the position of “cackling” in the sentence? Beginnings and endings are often places of prominence in a sentence. Knowing that, writers make an impact on a reader by saving a catchy or unusual word for the end. Roman II, therefore, is also a valid answer. As for Roman III, you must ask yourself whether the sound of the word “cackling” has a particular force. It probably does because it is somewhat onomatopoeic—that is, it sounds like the action it describes. Because all three descriptions fit, (E) is the best answer to this question.

3. The locution “Do you wiz zo haut can be?” (line 1) implies that the narrator
- (A) disapproves of guides who talk too much
 - (B) does not speak Italian
 - (C) cannot understand the guide
 - (D) is annoyed by the guide
 - (E) would prefer that the guide keep his mouth shut

Comment: Look for the answer to this question in the first main paragraph of the passage (lines 2–17), which provides a context for the locution and reveals the narrator’s state of mind. Choice (A) is a tempting answer because the narrator clearly disapproves of guides whose “tongues are never still.” But don’t answer too quickly. Remember that the question is about that opening locution. There is no clear link between the guide’s words—or, more accurately, the words that the narrator hears—and the quantity of talking done by the guide. The same reasoning applies to Choice (E), which seems acceptable until you carefully examine the larger context of the passage. With Choice (B), it is possible that the author doesn’t speak Italian. But again, that fact is not related to the opening locution, which is meant to be a phonetic transcription of what the author hears. Choice (D) may also be true, but the author’s annoyance is only suggested by the quasi-English utterance with which the passage opens. We are left, therefore, with Choice (C). Because the narrator cannot understand the Italian’s words, he mocks them. Indeed, later he adds, “Inspiration itself could hardly comprehend them” (line 7). Several of the choices in this question, although incorrect, seem to be potential answers because they accurately describe the narrator’s opinions. Don’t be misled by these so-called distractors. They are meant to draw unwary students away from the question being asked. Readers may confuse these facts with the truth of the statement in answering the question.

4. The objects of the verb "show" in line 8 make up a list of places that
- (A) tourists favor
 - (B) Italy has in great abundance
 - (C) inspire dreams
 - (D) demand visitors' respect
 - (E) provoke emotions

Comment: There is no reason for including the term "objects of the verb" in this question. The phrase is meant either to fool students into thinking that they face a grammar question or intimidate those with a shaky grasp of grammatical terminology. Whatever the purpose, the answer to the question is found in the overall context and tone of the passage. Choice (B) should be eliminated because the passage contains no evidence that Italy is abundantly endowed with masterpieces of art, venerable tombs, and so forth. (Italy, in fact, has plenty of art and tombs, but the passage doesn't imply that.) Choices (C), (D), and (E) are all partly true. But not all the places listed inspire dreams, demand respect, or provoke emotions. Some do, some don't. Therefore, Choice (A), being the most inclusive of the choices, is the best answer.

5. The tone in the clause "and we did that also" (line 22) suggests that the narrator
- (A) enjoys sightseeing
 - (B) is tired of traveling in Italy
 - (C) remembers seeing a photo of the Ambrosian Library in a geography schoolbook
 - (D) is an indifferent tourist
 - (E) dutifully follows the guide from place to place

Comment: To answer this question, you must know the definition of *tone*—the author's attitude toward his subject. In this case, the contents of the previous paragraph (lines 17–21) offer a good clue. Telling us about a wish to see La Scala, he writes, "We did so. It was a large place. Seven . . ." That taken care of, he moves on to the Ambrosian Library (" . . . we did that also"). Between the lines, the author is conveying the idea that he is blasé about visiting these places. Indeed, going to the opera house and to the library means little to him—until he sees the Virgil manuscript. Choice (A) is highly unlikely considering the totality of the narrator's account of his time in Italy. Choice (B) may be valid to a point, although the narrator never states outright that he'd like to go home. Choice (C) has no basis in fact. Choice (D), the correct answer, is evident in the narrator's account of La Scala and of his visit to the Ambrosian Library—at least until he lays eyes on the Virgil manuscript. Choice (E) seems reasonable except that the narrator twice says "we wished to go to . . .," implying an act of volition that is contrary to following the guide around from place to place.

6. Which of the following prepare the reader for the reference to “every garlic-exterminating mouth in Italy” (lines 33–34)?
- I. “waste of raw material” (line 25)
 - II. “it brought both parties fame” (line 26)
 - III. “a fountain of commiseration” (line 27)
 - IV. “her name a familiar word” (line 33)
- (A) I and III only
 - (B) II and IV only
 - (C) I, III, and IV only
 - (D) II, III, and IV only
 - (E) I, II, III, and IV

Comment: This question pertains to the rhetorical unity inherent in well-written prose. A passage often achieves a kind of coherence by repeatedly echoing a certain idea, not phrased in the same words each time but in words that are related. The phrase in question suggests that Laura’s name is famous throughout Italy. To prepare us for this fact, the author has included a number of phrases that indicate how well-known Laura has become. Each of the phrases marked Roman II, III, and IV alludes directly or indirectly to the magnitude of her renown. Only Roman I fails to allude to Laura’s fame. Therefore, Choice (D) is the correct answer.

7. To the narrator, the Virgil manuscript is
- (A) a popular attraction for tourists
 - (B) a historically significant document
 - (C) a literary masterpiece
 - (D) an example of bad judgment
 - (E) a stimulus for reflection

Comment: In the last paragraph of the passage, the narrator focuses not on the Virgil manuscript *per se* but on Petrarch’s annotations. Petrarch’s handwritten notes inspire the narrator to reflect on Petrarch’s relationship with Laura. Rather than sentimentalize Petrarch’s love, however, the narrator thinks about “Mr. Laura,” the “wronged” husband. In that sense, Choice (E) most accurately describes the narrator’s attitude toward the Virgil manuscript.

8. In line 25, “a clear waste of raw material” is best interpreted to mean that
- (A) Petrarch’s love of Laura was unrequited
 - (B) Petrarch should have loved another woman
 - (C) Petrarch’s sonnets were of poor quality
 - (D) Petrarch’s annotations on Virgil’s manuscript were pointless
 - (E) Too many tears have been spilled over the sad story of Petrarch and Laura

Comment: Questions that ask you to interpret the meaning of a sample of figurative language are popular on AP exams. The metaphor “clear waste of raw material” refers to “a love” that evidently was unhappy, making Choice (A) the best answer. If you piece together the story from hints in the passage, it seems that Petrarch loved Laura, who was married to another man. His love lasted a long time (“lavished upon her all through life”), and brought the pair not only

fame but sympathy (“created a fountain of commiseration”). Hindsight suggests that Petrarch might have been better off loving another woman—Choice (B)—but then his famous love sonnets might never have been written. Choice (C) and Choice (D) are not supported by material in the passage. Choice (E) is suggested by lines 37–39 (“Let the world go on fretting . . .”), but there is no obvious connection to the phrase “a clear waste of raw material.”

9. In which of the following sentences does the narrator use hyperbole to convey the intensity of his feelings?
- (A) Line 4: “These are the people . . .”
 - (B) Lines 12–13: “Sometimes when I . . .”
 - (C) Line 18: “We wished to go . . .”
 - (D) Line 28: “But who says a word . . .”
 - (E) Line 36: “It is all very fine . . .”

Comment: To find the answer to this question you must recognize *hyperbole*. Read all the sentences indicated by Choices (A)–(E). Look for an exaggeration meant to achieve a rhetorical effect. Only (B) contains such an overstatement: “I would give the whole world if the human parrot at my side would suddenly perish . . .” The “whole world” is a lot to give to be rid of the guide. Moreover, the author’s wish that the guide “would suddenly perish” is an extreme measure that overstates his desire to be rid of the man.

10. Which of the following best describes the narrator’s overall tone?
- (A) admiring and respectful
 - (B) pugnacious and patronizing
 - (C) contemptuous and hateful
 - (D) satirical and ironic
 - (E) moralistic and solemn

Comment: Choose an answer in which both adjectives accurately describe the narrator’s tone. Choice (B) contains only one such adjective: *patronizing*. The author adopts an air of superiority and condescension toward the guide in the very first line of the passage. In spite of his haughtiness, though, he is never hostile. Thus, *pugnacious* is not a valid description. There is very little in the passage to suggest that Choice (A) is the correct answer. Choice (C) overstates the author’s attitude. While he shows signs of contemptuousness, he never crosses the line to outright hatred. Because the humor in the passage eliminates Choice (E), we are left with Choice (D) as the correct answer. Indeed, throughout the passage the author holds up to derision not only the guide but his own situation as a tourist in Italy. What’s more, in discussing Laura’s husband, the author’s tongue is lodged firmly in his cheek. In other words, the passage reeks of irony.

11. The structure of the sentences in lines 28–31 does all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) create suspense
 - (B) express a mock indignation
 - (C) provoke amusement
 - (D) vary the rhythm of the prose
 - (E) add a touch of playfulness

Comment: At issue in this question is the effect of sentence structure on a reader's response to a passage. By and large, the lines in question consist of a series of short interrogatives about "poor Mr. Laura." Also included is a parenthetical remark and a one-word answer—"Nobody"—to several of the questions. The writing in the passage is informal, its tone more lighthearted than ponderous. A series of staccato-like rhetorical questions might suggest anger, but the subject matter (the long-ignored husband of the famous Laura) is far from somber. Thus, Choices (B), (C), and (E) accurately describe the passage. Choice (D) is also valid because the rest of the passage is made up predominantly of longer, complex, and compound sentences. Only Choice (A) does not apply.

The foregoing questions represent a sample of the many types of questions included in the exam. The following list will give you an idea of numerous other types that have recently appeared:

1. Identify the relation of a sentence in the first paragraph to the passage as a whole.
2. Name the rhetorical strategy or device used in a particular section of the passage.
3. Identify the function of a sentence within a paragraph, or a paragraph within the whole.
4. Choose the best title or main topic of a passage.
5. Compare two segments of the passage for their theme, tone, style, sentence structure, diction, syntax, effect, or rhetorical purpose.
6. Determine how unity (or point of view, emphasis, contrast, or other feature) is achieved in all or part of the passage.
7. Recognize the overall genre of the passage.
8. Identify the author's implied or actual purpose or the purpose of particular images, diction, organization, sentence structure, or other stylistic choice.

Techniques for Reading Passages

By this time in your school career you have taken numerous tests like the SATs or ACTs, for which you have read passages like those on the AP English exam and answered multiple-choice questions. No doubt you've developed certain techniques of test taking. You've probably also observed that there is no universal technique that serves everyone equally. What works for others may not work for you and vice versa.

Nevertheless, it is helpful to be aware of which techniques lead you to do your best. As you prepare for the AP exam, consider trying each of the alternatives discussed below. If time permits, you might try each one in turn as you work your way through the exercises that follow or take the practice exams in the last section of this book. Gradually you'll discover which technique—or combination of techniques—works best for you.

OPTION A

Read the passage carefully from start to finish with pencil in hand. As you read, keep in mind that on this test you will be asked questions primarily about the language and rhetoric of the passage, not about its meaning (although you may get a small number of comprehension questions). While reading, underline any unusual turns of phrase. Make a note of particularly vivid images and of figures of speech. Try also to figure out the tone of the passage. Ask yourself,

“What is the author trying to say about the subject?” Then mark any words, phrases, or ideas that clearly contribute to the tone. Finally, observe how the passage is organized. Is there a progression of ideas? What does each paragraph contribute to the main point of the passage? Then turn to the questions, referring to the passage as necessary to find or check your answers.

OPTION B

Skim the passage for its general idea. Read faster than you normally would, trying only to ascertain the general topic and the approach used by the author: Is the passage formal or informal? Personal or objective? Is it mainly a narrative? A description? An argument for or against some issue? The answers to these questions will be fairly apparent during a quick read-through. Make a mental note of any unusual words and phrases. Read intently enough to get an impression of the content and writing style of the passage, but don't dawdle. Then, as you answer the questions, refer to the passage.

OPTION C

Skim the passage for a general impression; then go back and read it more thoroughly using your pencil to mark the passage and take notes. Two readings, one fast and one slow, allow you to pick out features of language and rhetoric that you might overlook during a single reading. Why? Because from the first reading you'll know what the passage is about, and during the second you'll be able to focus on the features that contribute to the overall meaning and effect of the passage. After the second reading proceed to the questions, referring to the passage to check your answers.

OPTION D

Read the passage only after you've read the questions. Because it's virtually impossible to remember ten or twelve questions about material you haven't read, review the questions quickly—only to become acquainted with the kinds of information you are expected to draw out of the passage. Identify each question with a brief notation: “MI” (main idea), “T” (tone), “POV” (point of view), “SS” (sentence structure), and so on. (You can devise your own system.) When you know the questions beforehand, you can read the passage more purposefully, taking into account the matters raised by the questions.

Whatever you do, don't even think of answering the questions without thoroughly reading the passage from start to finish. Misguided students sometimes read one question first, then start scouring the passage in search of an answer. Then they move to the second question and repeat their search. Before they know it, time runs out, and they are far from finishing. Moreover, such a fragmented approach reduces the likelihood of grasping the overall point of the passage.