

Free AP English Webinar:

# Middle of the Year: Where are you going? Where have you been?

Dec.  
**10**  
7 p.m.  
EST



**Dr. Brandon Abdon**  
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and author

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AP English teacher  
and author

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AP English teacher  
and consultant

Figure out what's  
working, identify needs,  
and map out plans for a  
strong second semester!



# Middle of the Year: Where are you going? Where have you been?\*

December 2025



\*shout out to Joyce Carol Oates

# Write into It.

IN THE CHAT: How are you feeling? How are your students feeling? What have or will you do to celebrate any growth and prepare them to move forward?



# Celebrate the Gains

## What the First Semester Shows About Growth

- As the semester closes, teachers often focus on unfinished tasks.
- But students usually show more growth than we realize when we pause to look.

# What Real Growth Looks Like

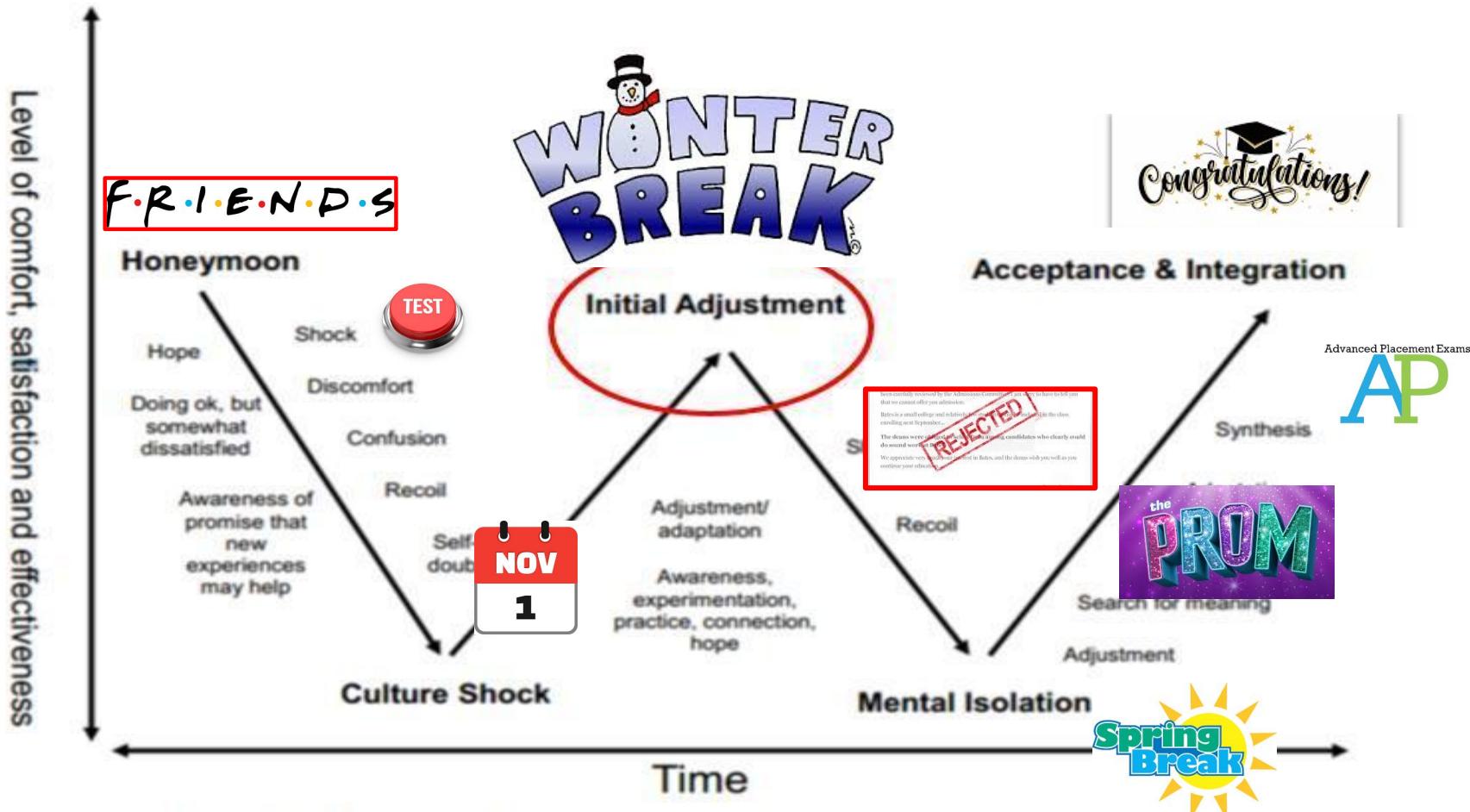
- Students move from summary to interpretation.
- Writers take interpretive risks; ideas deepen.
- Confidence grows: participation, thinking, revision.
- Improvement comes from steady, purposeful practice.

# Rest, Reset, and Enter Second Semester

- Avoid assigning homework over break—rest consolidates learning.
- Compare early vs. recent work in January to highlight growth.
- Start second semester with clarity, momentum, and a growth mindset.

# Some of Brandon's Materials and Activities

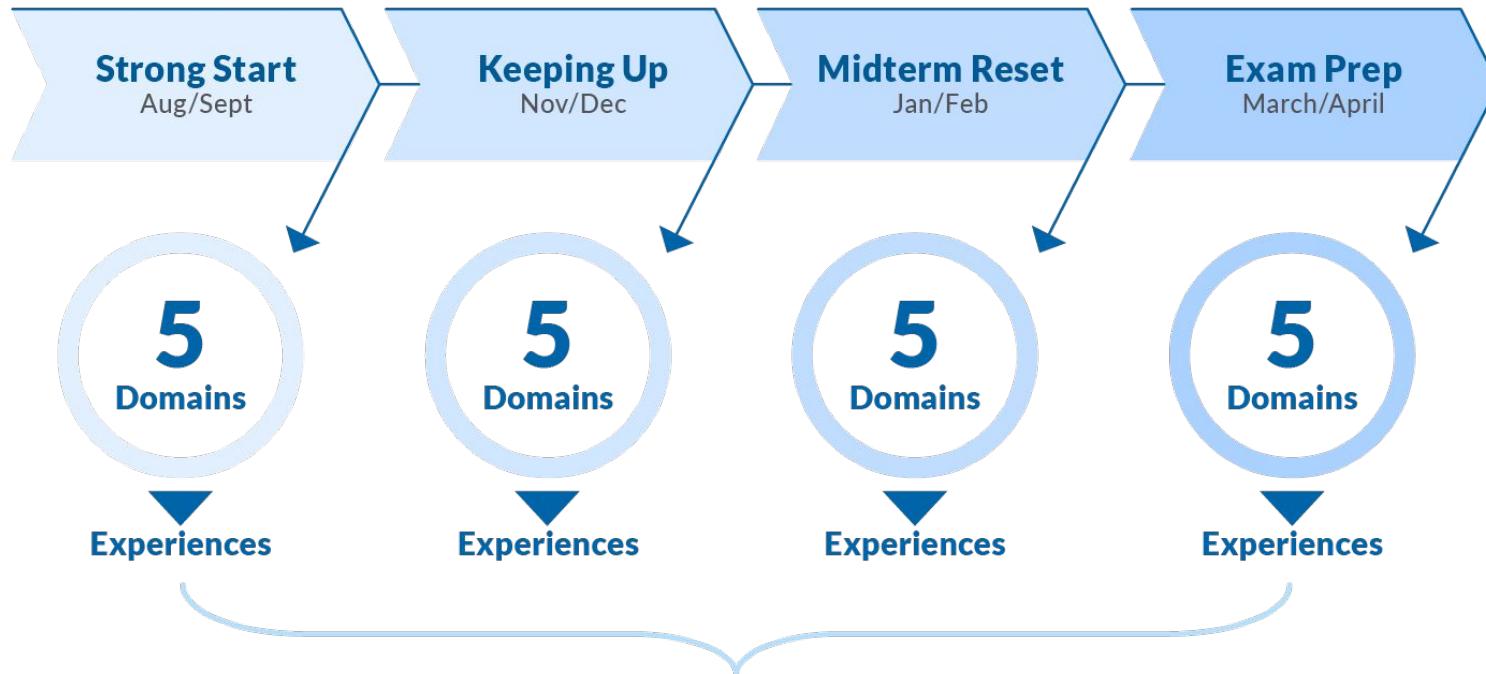
- Brilliant things I read in your papers this semester.
- AP Lit: [“Seeing the Unseen” or “Scene-ing the Unseen”](#)
- AP Lang: [“Rhetoric in Performance” or “Staging the Situation”](#)
- AP Lang: [“Synthesis on Air” or “Expert Panel Performance”](#)
- Any Course: [“5Rs: Return, Revisit, Revise, Reflect, Resubmit”](#)
- [AP Lit / AP Lang Pacing Guide](#)
- [Lang Scope and Sequence Planning Tool](#)
- [Lit Scope and Sequence Planning Tool](#)



Source: Hoffenburger, K., Mosier, R., & Stokes, B. (1999). Transition experience. In J.H. Schuh (Ed.), *Educational programming and student learning in college and university residence halls*. Columbus, OH: ACUHO-I

What are your unique challenges?

## Mass Insight On-Track Framework



DOMAINS

**Mindsets**

Mindsets refer to a series of self-perceptions or beliefs people hold about themselves that determine behavior, outlook, and mental attitude. Students' mindsets are essential to their ability and willingness to persevere and believe in themselves.

**Student Voice and Agency**

Student agency is rooted in the belief that students have the ability and will to positively influence their own lives and the world around them. It can be defined as the capacity to set a goal, reflect, and act responsibly to effect change.

**Classroom Community and Culture**

Classroom culture is largely about the way that teachers and students communicate and the way that students communicate with each other, as well the common values developed around engaging in challenging academic work.

**AP Skill Building**

Advanced classes require high levels of critical thinking and analytical skills to prepare for the AP Exam, and the future courses students will take throughout college.

**Feedback and Grading**

Feedback is information given to students about their performance that guides future behavior. Feedback can help set a path for students, directing their attention to areas for growth and improvement, and connecting them with future learning opportunities. At the same time, there is an evaluative component to feedback, regardless of whether it is given with a grade. Effective feedback tells students what they do and don't understand, where their performance is going well or needs work, and where they should direct their future efforts. Feedback is essential to students' learning and growth.

**Strong Start**  
Aug/Sept

**Keeping Up**  
Nov/Dec

**Midterm Reset**  
Jan/Feb

**Exam Prep**  
March/April

**Sample Student Experiences**

- Teach students about growth mindset
- Engage students in conversations around rigorous learning

- Stress that mistakes and revisions are how people learn, not signs that they do not belong
- Provide opportunities for students to compare work from the beginning of the school year to see progression

- Reinvest students in purpose and importance of their hard work
- Re-invigorate students so they can see they are halfway through the course

- Help students connect the AP exam to real life
- Manage and minimize test anxiety

- Explicitly teach and model for students how to ask for and access help
- Assign students to set goals for AP class participation and learning

- Release control to students and support them in being independent
- Set up AP classroom checkups- quick student progress reports on how students are doing

- Step back into a more informal/supportive role, letting students take center stage
- Assign students to lead learning recaps from the first half of the year

- Help students set performance goals and expectations for AP exam
- Work with students to set goals around AP exam preparation

- Build in structures to learn about the culture, language, and values of students
- Communicate with all families at least once to establish relationships

- Solicit input from students on "what's not going well"
- Formally assign student work groups

- Celebrate accomplishments from first half of course
- Reach out to every family again, re-grounding families in AP course

- Leverage community partnerships to provide additional support to students
- Create a "team approach" to test day (team spirit/all working together)

- Provide opportunities for checking for understanding
- Help students practice planning skills

- Explicitly teach project planning and planning for due dates
- Begin practicing AP exam format regularly, with assessments mirroring the exam format

- Utilize midterm assessment as AP exam practice
- Build in regular time for pulse checks and material recaps

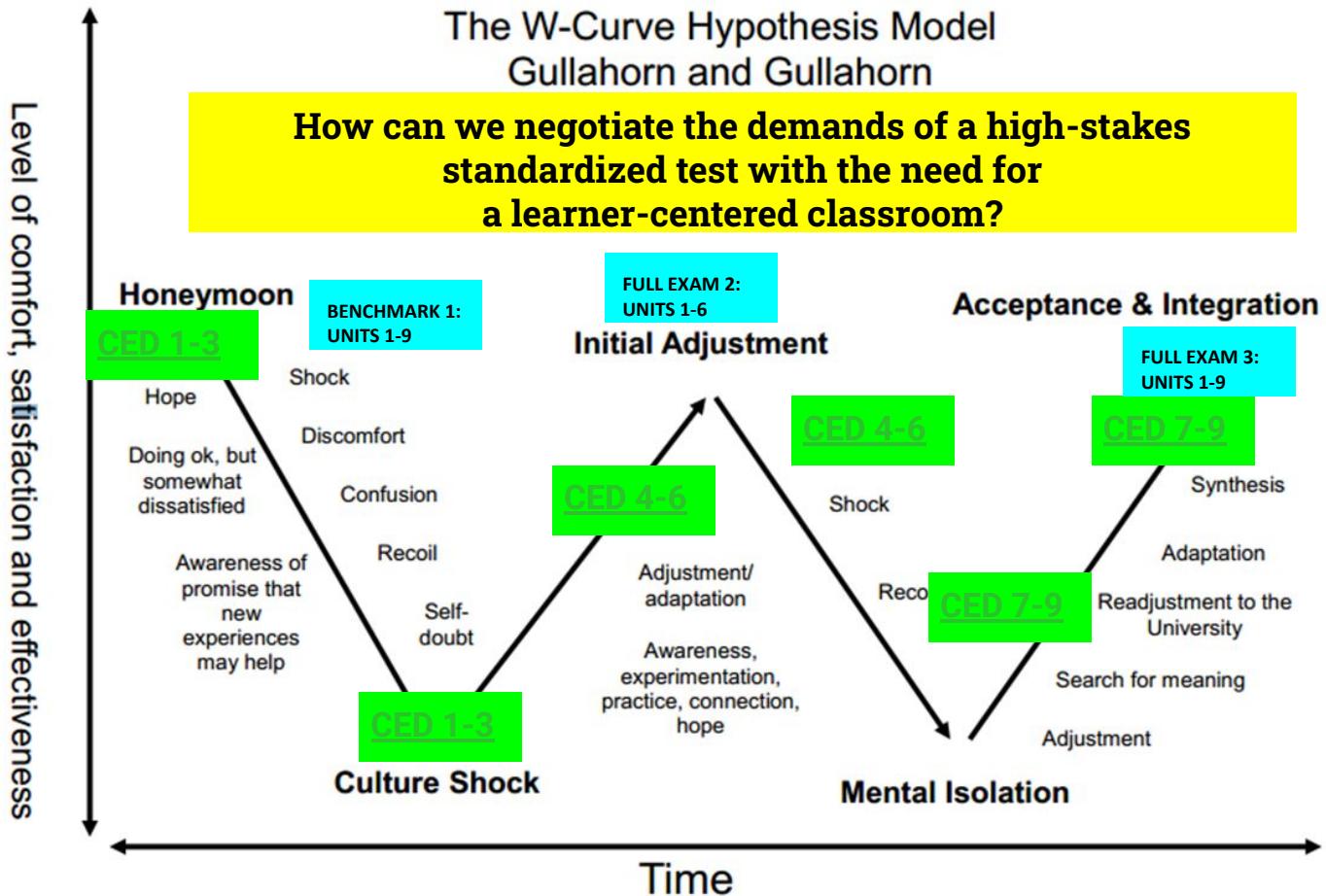
- Help students build stamina and plan for the 3 hour AP exam
- Ensure all barriers to sitting for the AP exam are removed

- Ensure quick gains to build up confidence
- Help students make connections between activities and goals

- Set up AP study hall where students have access to AP teacher(s) regularly
- Reframe "numerical grades" as potential qualifying scores on the AP exam

- Utilize data to conference with students and invest them in their own learning/growth
- Move from direct to indirect feedback- allow students to identify and correct their own errors

- Work with students to identify strengths/weaknesses from year of AP learning
- Help students identify how they have grown during their AP learning and celebrate that growth



Source: Hoffenburger, K., Mosier, R., & Stokes, B. (1999). Transition experience. In J.H. Schuh (Ed.), Educational programming and student learning in college and university residence halls. Columbus, OH: ACUHO-I

[CED 1-3 Round 1](#): Course Introduction, Benchmarks, MC

[CED 1-3 Round 2](#): King Lear, Poetry, MC

[CED 4-6 Round 1](#): Intertextuality (Greek Tragedies, Contemporary Novels, Poetry), MC

[CED 4-6 Round 2](#): Monster Books, Poetry

[CED 7-9 Round 1](#): Meaning and Importance of Food and Rituals (Contemporary Novels), Metaphysical Poetry, MC

[CED 7-9 Round 2](#): Student Choice Text & TED Talk

**BENCHMARK 1: Multiple Choice, All FRQs (Units 1-9)**

**SEMESTER EXAM: MC, All FRQs (Units 1-6)**

**YEAR-END EXAM: MC, All FRQs (Units 1-9)**

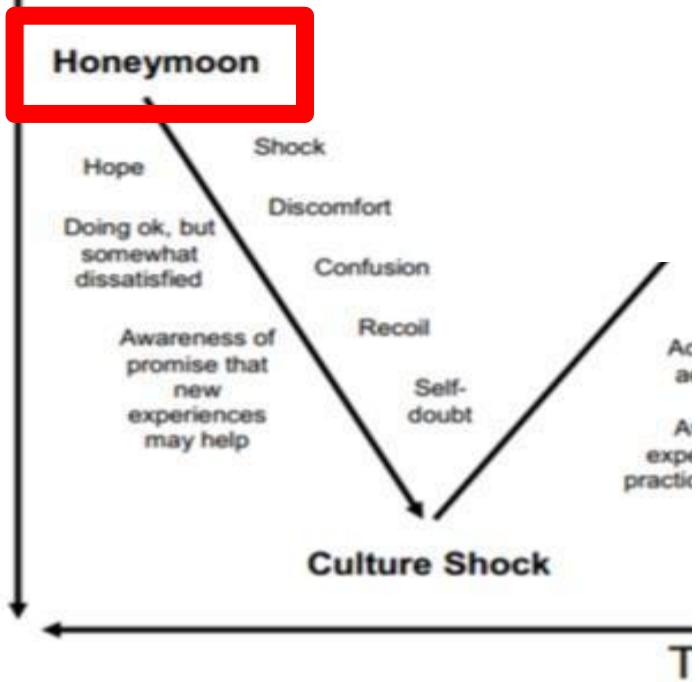
- [Progress Checks & Reflections All Year](#)

[Semester 1 Calendar](#)  
[Semester 2 Calendar](#)

	<p><b>1. Persisting</b>  <i>Stick to it!</i>      Persevering in task through to completion; remaining focused. Looking for ways to reach your goal when stuck. Not giving up.</p>		<p><b>2. Managing Impulsivity</b>  <i>Take your time!</i>      Thinking before acting; remaining calm, thoughtful and deliberative.</p>		<p><b>3. Listening with understanding and empathy</b>  <i>Understand others!</i>      Devoting mental energy to another person's thoughts and ideas; Make an effort to perceive another's point of view and emotions.</p>		<p><b>4. Thinking flexibly</b>  <i>Look at it another way!</i>      Being able to change perspectives, generate alternatives, consider options.</p>
	<p><b>5. Thinking about your thinking</b>  <i>(Metacognition)</i>  <i>Know your knowing!</i>      Being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others.</p>		<p><b>6. Striving for accuracy</b>  <i>Check it again!</i>      Always doing your best. Setting high standards. Checking and finding ways to improve constantly.</p>		<p><b>7. Questioning and problem posing</b>  <i>How do you know?</i>      Having a questioning attitude; knowing what data are needed &amp; developing questioning strategies to produce those data. Finding problems to solve.</p>		<p><b>8. Applying past knowledge to new situations</b>  <i>Use what you learn!</i>      Accessing prior knowledge; transferring knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.</p>
	<p><b>9. Thinking &amp; communicating with clarity and precision</b>  <i>Be clear!</i>      Strive for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding over-generalizations, distortions, deletions and exaggerations.</p>		<p><b>10. Gather data through all senses</b>  <i>Use your natural pathways!</i>      Pay attention to the world around you. Gather data through all the senses. taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight.</p>		<p><b>11. Creating, imagining, and innovating</b>  <i>Try a different way!</i>      Generating new and novel ideas, fluency, originality</p>		<p><b>12. Responding with wonderment and awe</b>  <i>Have fun figuring it out!</i>      Finding the world awesome, mysterious and being intrigued with phenomena and beauty.</p>
	<p><b>13. Taking responsible risks</b>  <i>Venture out!</i>      Being adventuresome; living on the edge of one's competence. Try new things constantly.</p>		<p><b>14. Finding humor</b>  <i>Laugh a little!</i>      Finding the whimsical, incongruous and unexpected. Being able to laugh at one's self.</p>		<p><b>15. Thinking interdependently</b>  <i>Work together!</i>      Being able to work in and learn from others in reciprocal situations. Team work.</p>		<p><b>16. Remaining open to continuous learning</b>  <i>Learn from experiences!</i>      Having humility and pride when admitting we don't know; resisting complacency.</p>

### Level of comfort, satisfaction and effectiveness

# HABIT OF MIND RECIPE CARDS



students develop habits of mind

## Nikki Wilson's Class Develops Effective Thinkers

In Mason City Schools, personalized learning is about stretching each and every learner to deepen their academic knowledge while also growing the skills and habits of lifelong learners. With that goal in mind, students in **Nikki Wilson's** Advanced Placement Literature and English 4 classes at Mason High School start the year by reflecting on their strengths as learners and how they will lean on those strengths to support their learning throughout the year.

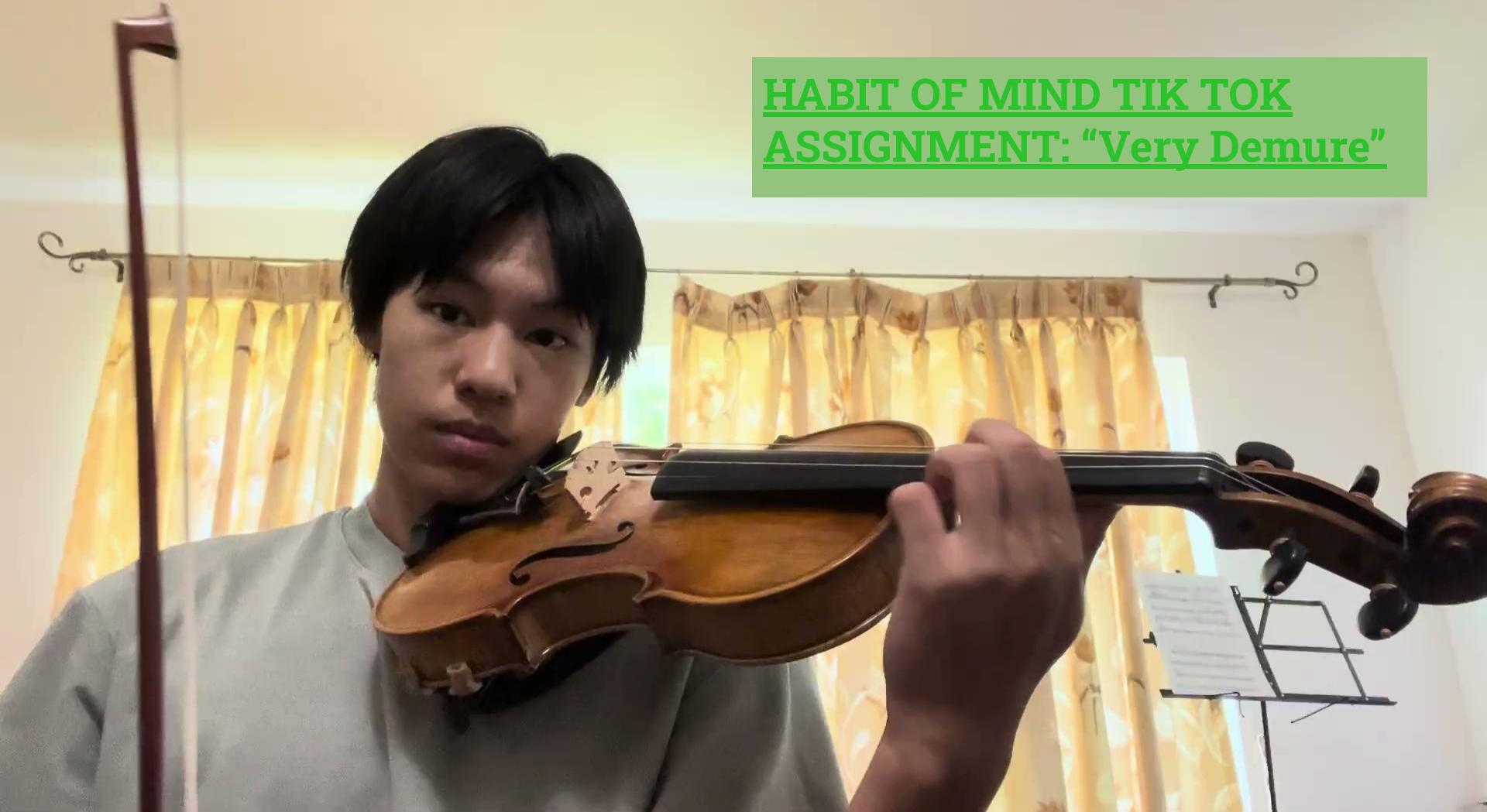
Ms. Wilson has students reflect on which research-based traits of effective thinkers, known as "Habits of Mind," reflect their personalities and past experiences. Using the metaphor of a recipe, students then create a personal recipe card that identifies their strengths and how they've developed them. Ms. Wilson notes, "By examining their personal strengths and preferences, students can gain a deeper understanding of how their unique qualities contribute to their learning process and their personalized learning pathways." Later in the year, students apply this same concept as they analyze characters in texts.

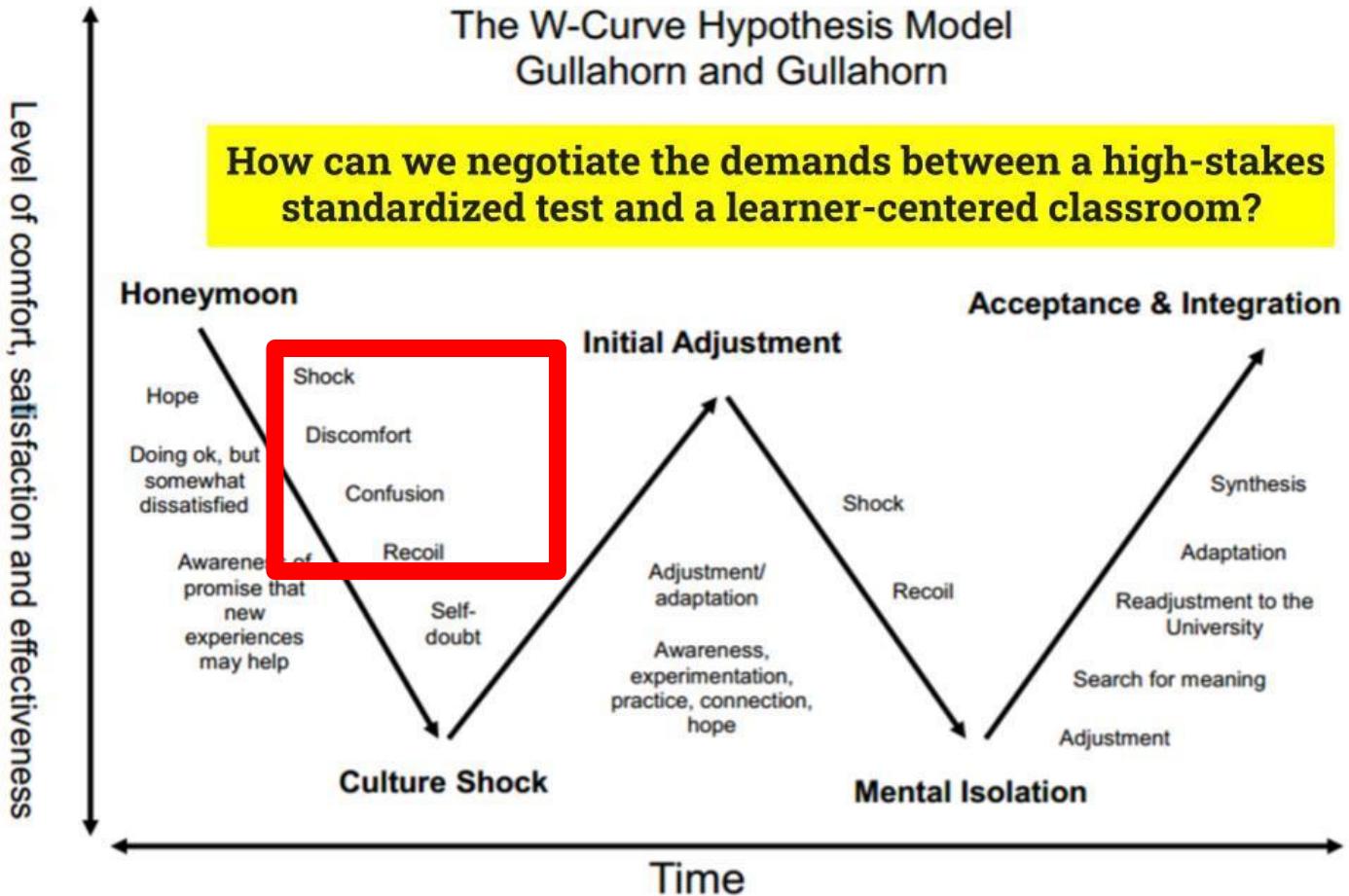


Source: Hoffenburger, K., Mosier, R., & Stokes, B. (1999). Transition experience in college and university residence halls. Columbus, OH: ACUHO-I.

[Continue Reading >](#)

HABIT OF MIND TIK TOK  
ASSIGNMENT: "Very Demure"

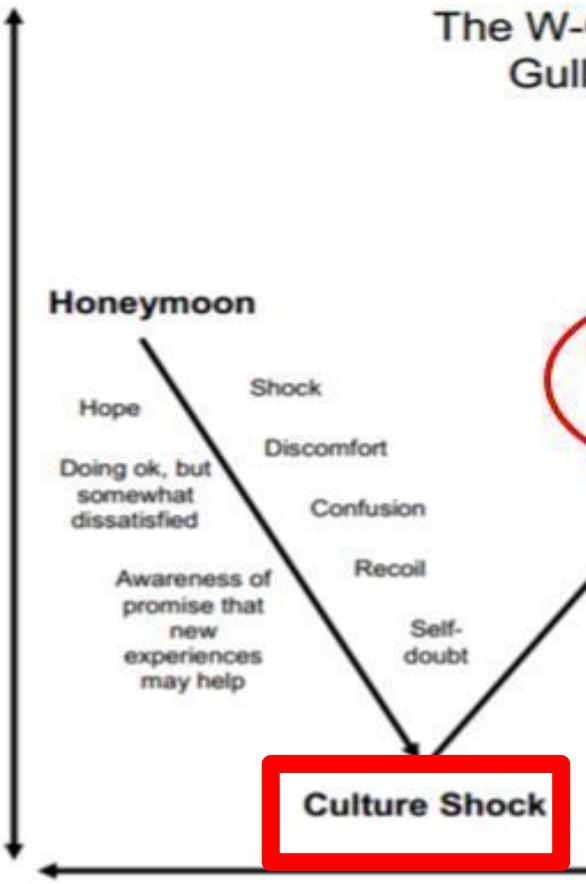




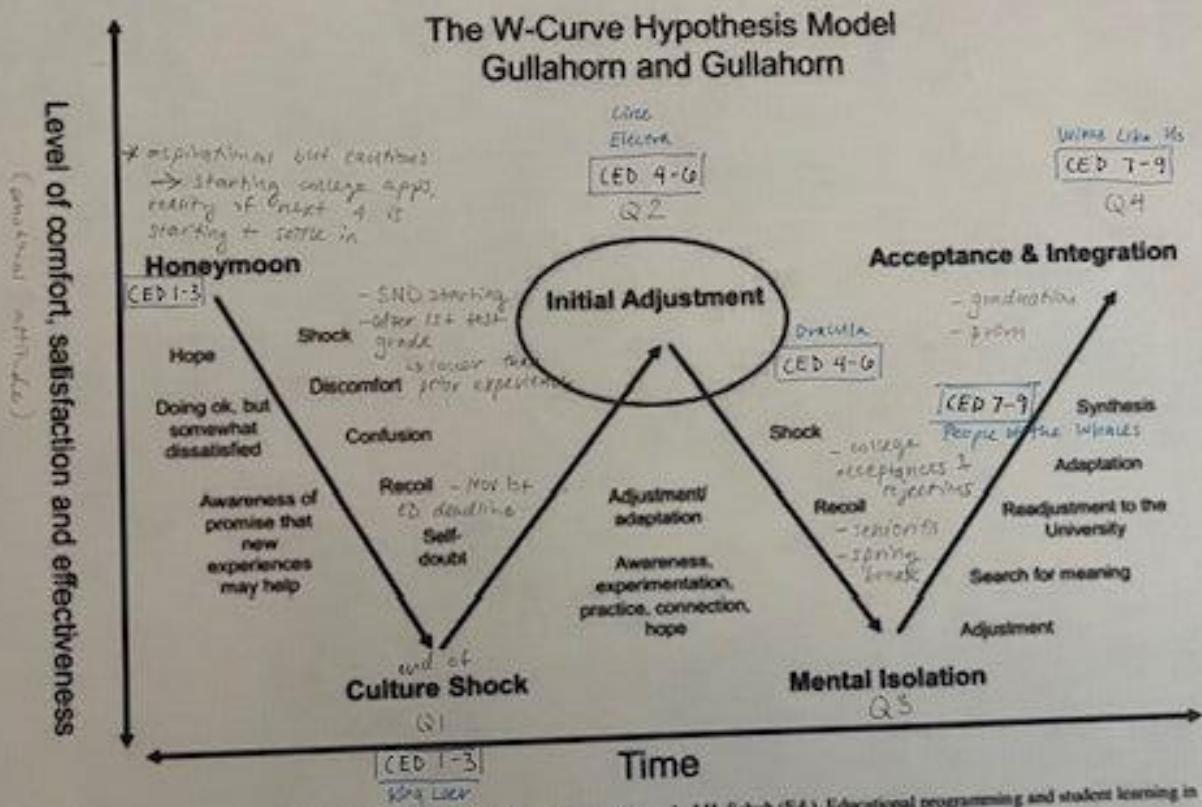
**W-Curve of Culture Shock Activity**

- Review the W-Curve of Culture Shock
- Identify a couple of keywords describing your current emotional state (e.g., Honeymoon Period: excited and hopeful, Honeymoon Period: curious and tentative, etc.) aligned with a “plot point” on the W-Curve of Culture Shock.
- Write 3-4 sentences explaining WHY you feel this way about the workshop/the essential question at this point.

Level of comfort, satisfaction and effectiveness



I found our friend's head in the cauldron ...



Source: Hoffenburger, K., Mosier, R., & Stokes, B. (1999). Transition experience. In J.H. Schuh (Ed.), *Educational programming and student learning in college and university residence halls*. Columbus, OH: ACHON.

4/11: creating, imagining, narrating → find new ways to enjoy my fall season despite the stress

→ Exhausted but driven → working late everyday for college app & school yet looking forward to the future

## HONEYMOON:

- Aspirational but cautious
- Habit of Mind: Thinking Creatively

## CULTURE SHOCK:

- Exhausted but driven
- Habit of Mind: Thinking Creatively -- Find novel ways to enjoy my fall season despite the stress.



Mrs. Wilson gave me the sophistication point because I developed "a complex literary argument" that explored the tensions in the poem. I also employed "a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive".

I initially gave myself a 0 because I made some jumps from my evidence to my commentary and didn't fully explain how all my evidence supported my argument. After reviewing her grading and my essay, I agree with her score. I understand how my vivid writing style and exploration of the complex tensions between solitude and companionship may earn me the sophistication point.

**REVISION:** How might you improve your score using strategies that we have already learned and applied in class? Ex: 3-level thesis, 3x3, shifts analysis. **Provide a specific example of an improvement you made to your essay using this strategy.** (Copy and paste a sentence or two with these revisions that focus on the specific skill that you said you wanted to improve).

**Skill:** FIG 5.B Explain the function of specific words and phrases in a text.

**Strategy:** I will use shift analysis to analyze the narrator's tone change before and after the speaker's encounter with the saxophone player. This will strengthen my commentary to support my argument that the speaker's perception about solitude changed because of this encounter. I also will delete irrelevant evidence (description of saxophonist quotes) that doesn't support my unifying idea and argument.

**Revision** (3rd paragraph): However, this belief is challenged when the speaker encounters the saxophone player and experiences a taste of companionship. When the saxophone player steps backwards to create space for the speaker, he feels "welcome" to "set down [his] case" and raises his lips to his saxophone. The speaker finally feels that the silence is "complete", that he isn't in "this heartland of pure noise" but elsewhere unburdened by the previous "earthbound" feeling. The music duet of the speaker and saxophonist uplifts the speaker to feel as if he is an "encumbered bird": free and un tethered. There is a vivid contrast in tone from before and after the speaker's encounter with the saxophonist. Before, deprecating diction like "I can't", "earthbound", and "don't try to tell me otherwise" was used to describe the speaker's negative attitude towards life. Now, he feels fulfilled and peaceful, released from the "earthbound" feeling.

Template adapted from Hampton, M. (2014). *Reflective writing: a basic introduction*. University of Portsmouth.

RECIPE

INGREDIENTS & DIRECTIONS

**TITLE:** Alisa Zhao **SERVES:** Bell #1

**PREP TIME:** Creating, Imagining, and Innovating **COOK TIME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DEFINITION:** Generating new & novel ideas, fluency, originality

Since 5, I've been taking art classes. I had only ever drawn using examples to practice & refine my skills. One day, while scrolling through Instagram, a whale in the sky, a farmers market selling magical machines, and a boy chasing a spirit through Chinatown.



## 11. Creating, Imagining, and Innovating

Try a different way!

Generating new and novel ideas, fluency, originality

**Portrait of a Comet:** Skills within each competency area

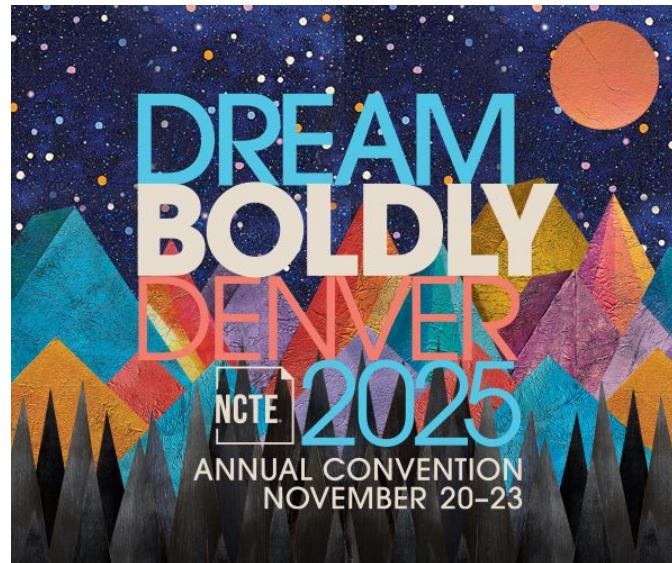
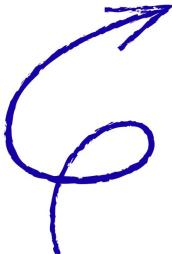
**Personalized Learning:** Social Construction, Self-Discovery, and Co-Creation

**Potential OTES Connections:** Instructional Planning - Connections to State Standards and District Priorities

**Lesson Delivery - Communication with Students**

# More Social Media Trend Frameworks?

click  
here!



# KRISTY

## Leaving in 2025

- Drinking from the firehose
- Traditional strategies and expectations
- Excusing student apathy or behavior

## Taking into 2026

- Taking smaller, intentional steps toward progress
- Meeting the tech generation where they are
- Accountability and partnerships with stakeholders

IN THE CHAT: What are some things you would like to “leave behind”? What would you like to take into the new year?

# Semester 1 Schedule

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## AP Lang

- Rhetorical Analysis
  - Rhetorical Situation
  - Close reading
  - Thesis
  - Evidence
  - Line of Reasoning
  - Logical Reasoning
- *1984*
- *The Crucible*
- Speeches, visual rhetoric, media, early exploration narratives unit  
cross-curricular with AP Gov

## AP Lit

- Poetry
  - Close reading
  - Thesis
  - Evidence
  - Line of Reasoning
  - Logical Reasoning
- Atwood poetry unit
- *Othello*
- *Medea*
- *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* (bellringers)

# Looking Ahead

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- [Reflection Form](#)
- Shift to digital practice
- Lang: Argument, Synthesis      Lit: Prose, Literary Argument
- April “Boot Camp”

# Fall 2025 Mid Year Class Eval - AP Lang

⋮

Last Name \*

Short answer text

First Name \*

Short answer text

Block \*

3

4

5

7

6

At this point in the year, how confident do you feel for the AP English Language Exam (in the skills we have practiced so far)?

1 ⏪ to ⏩ 5

1 Label (optional)

5 Label (optional)



Required



After section 1 Continue to next section

Section 2 of 2

Answer the following as clearly as you can. Please keep in mind that I want you to be honest, but tactful (after all - this IS a class in rhetoric, and as we know - claims need support and rants / rude tones are not usually well received or helpful). Also, please be honestly reflective in that there are classroom policies and procedures that I MUST adhere to (I cannot change the scope of the exam, nor the timing; I MUST take approximately 2 grades a week over the course of a quarter, etc).

Description (optional)

What was your favorite unit of study, text, or skill learned in this class during semester 1 - and why? \*

Long answer text

What was your least favorite unit of study, text, or skill learned in this class so far- and why? \*

Long answer text

What was your favorite activity or assignment and why? \*

Long answer text

What was your least favorite activity or assignment and why? \*

Long answer text

What was the most HELPFUL assignment, unit, or activity this year and why? \*

Long answer text

Can you suggest a really engaging / cool and helpful activity that might help future students learn a skill necessary to this course? \*

Long answer text

Cheating and AI are rampant and apparent - how do you suggest English classes incorporate in class ways for students to learn material - something helpful and that would steer students away from resorting to AI to "think" for them? \*

Long answer text

Any final thoughts for me \*

Long answer text

I am so proud of all of the work you have done this semester! I hope you take some time for yourself over break - the work will still be here when we get back, so just take some time to unplug for YOU! <3

Long answer text

Qs from U

We are risk takers  
and mistake makers

(thanks Andy)

# Next Step Blog



# NEXT<sup>®</sup> STEP

A community-driven blog providing resources for educators, by educators.

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## NEXT<sup>®</sup> STEP

### Celebrate the Gains: What the First Semester Really Shows Us About Growth

Dr. Brandon Abdon

AP<sup>®</sup> English AP<sup>®</sup> Literature AP<sup>®</sup> Language

*"The December spiral ... prevents us from seeing the slow, meaningful gains our students are actually making."*

Every year around mid-December, I find myself slipping into the same familiar pattern of thought—whether I'm teaching my own classes or working with teachers across districts and states. In my own classroom, I used to look at the calendar and suddenly hear an internal list begin to rattle off: *We didn't quite finish that lesson. The mini-unit on commentary never fully took off. Too many still struggle with their thesis statements. My students still hesitate to take interpretive risks. We didn't get as far as I'd hoped.*

I've realized that this instinct is so common among English teachers that it almost feels like part of the rhythm of the profession—plan, teach, assess, PANIC. But over time—after teaching, coaching, observing, and reading what the research actually says about learning—I've come to believe the December spiral is not only unnecessary but counterproductive. It prevents us from seeing the slow, meaningful gains our students are *actually* making.

This is not about being "Pollyanna-ish." I've never believed in sugarcoating the work, and I've seen enough classrooms to know that real challenges demand real attention. But facing those challenges is easier—and far more accurate—when we ground ourselves in the truth: **students grow more than we give them credit for, especially when we slow down long enough to notice the gains.**

#### Why We Fixate on What's Missing

English teachers are planners, organizers, anticipators. We're constantly charting and revising a course for learning that is layered, recursive, and targeted. So when December arrives, it's easy to measure our semester by what remains undone.

Subscribe to the Next Step blog here! Which curriculum area are you responsible for?\*

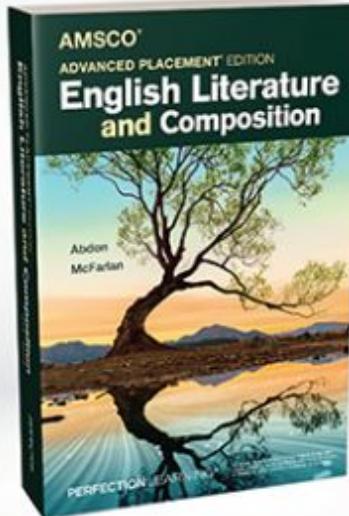
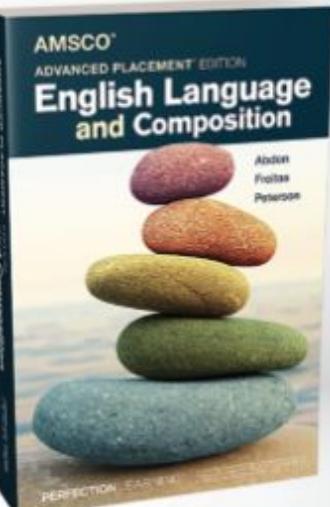
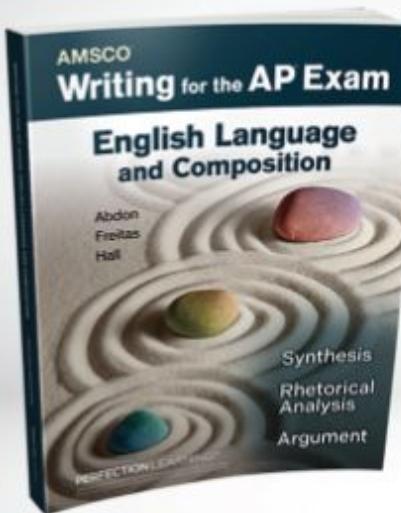
AP Social Studies  
 AP English  
 6-8 ELA  
 9-12 ELA  
 I want it all!

School Name

School Zip code

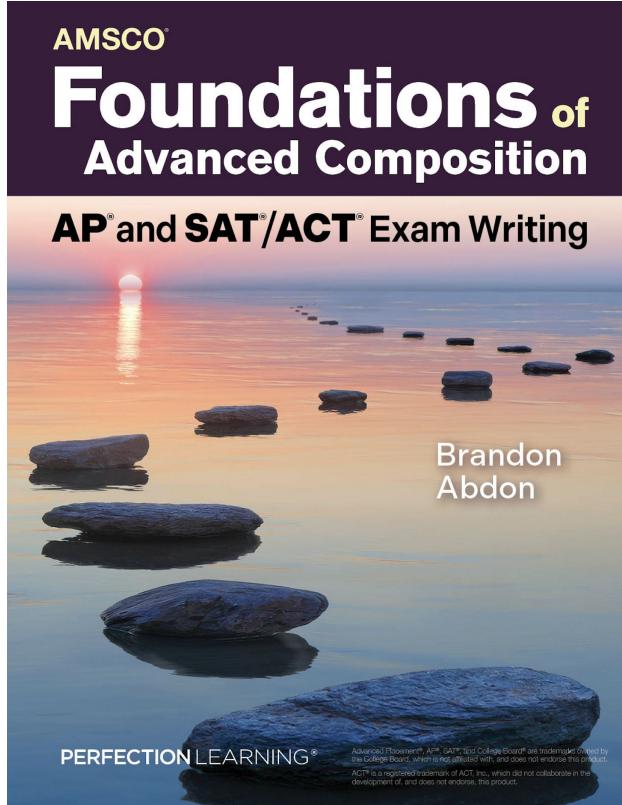
First name\*

PERFECTION LEARNING®



AP English  
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Literature and  
Composition



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  - Lessons with question types for each
  - Each lesson aligned to standards or expectations for each



Please do the survey

&

Please be in touch

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nichole.wilson@fulbrightmail.org

Seidelkristy@gmail.com

Thank you!

KRISTY SEIDEL

# APSI 2026

June 22 – 25: Walton High School, Marietta GA

AP Lit

July 7-10 : University of Georgia, Athens GA

AP Lang

July 13-16 : University of South Florida, Tampa FL

AP Lang

July 20-23 : Pinellas County, St. Petersburg FL

AP Lit



## Brandon's 2026 Summer Workshops and APSIs

June 1-3	Garden of English 3-day Event	6-10 ELA - Online
June 8-11	Novi, MI - Novi HS APSI	Literature - Online
June 12-18	Cincinnati - The Reading	Literature
June 22-26	Bowling Green, KY - Western Ky Univ.	Literature - In-Person
Jun 29-Jul 3	Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON - AP Canada	Lang & Lit - In-Person
July 6-10	Garden of English	Language - Online
July 16-17	Honolulu, HI - Hawaii DoE	Pre-AP - In-Person
July 20-23	Honolulu, HI - Hawaii DoE	Language - In-Person
August 3-6	Richmond, KY - Eastern Kentucky Univ.	Language - Online
August 3-6	Garden of English - Evenings (5-8 ET)	Language - Online



*Bring Soul To The Recipe*

# AP ENGLISH LITERATURE

FACILITATOR: NICHOLE WILSON



**Thank you for joining me today! Please join me at one of my 2026 AP Summer Institutes!**

- June 22-25, 2026: Plainfield, IL (onsite)
- June 29-July 3, 2026: Western Kentucky University (online)
- July 7-16, 2026: Northwestern University (online, 6 hours synchronous/9 hours asynchronous for two weeks)
- July 13-July 17, 2026: Western Kentucky University, St. Louis
- July 21-24, 2026: West Virginia (onsite)
- July 20-24, 2026: Manhattan University (online)
- July 27-31, 2026: Manhattan University (onsite)
- August 3-6, 2026: Manhattan University (online)