



PINEWOOD - THE AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THESSALONIKI, GREECE

AP SEMINAR

AP Seminar is the **first** of **two** courses that serve as the **core** of the **AP Capstone** program. It is not designed to focus on any specific topic or discipline. Instead, it is designed to develop the **analytic** and **critical** thinking skills that will be essential for success in higher education. It is, in effect, an **introduction to undergraduate-level research**. And it is a **prerequisite** for the second course in the AP Capstone program: **AP Research**.

AP Seminar gives students the opportunity to learn effective research skills through a **rigorous** schedule of **group** and **individual research projects** and through careful analysis of a wide variety of texts. Unlike most official AP scores, which are dependent entirely or almost entirely on a single exam taken in May of each year, **scores** for AP Seminar are based on a **combination of research papers, presentations, and a final exam**. The grades students receive on their Pinewood report cards are drawn from assessments that are **modeled** on the papers, presentations, and exam that make up the official score from the College Board, to ensure that students are well prepared for the tasks they will complete for that score (which is, like all AP courses, on a 1-5 scale).

The tasks that constitute the official AP Seminar score from the College Board are listed below, along with rough estimates of the timing for when each task will be completed:

Performance Task 1 (PT1): a group project on a particular problem chosen by the group. The problem chosen by the group can be an intellectual problem, a political problem, a technological problem, etc. The main point is that the group needs to be working on a research question that leads them to propose some sort of solution. This activity will usually run from approximately mid-December to mid-February. PT1 is worth 20% of the overall score in AP Seminar, with the paper and the presentation each being worth 10% (in other words, the paper and the presentation are both worth 50% of PT1's 20% of the total). There are two parts to this task.

- **First**, students individually write a paper of approximately 1,200 words on some aspect of the topic the group has chosen. The paper is written to inform the other group members of the latest research on the aspect of the topic the student has selected and should be written in a professional and academic style and informed by relevant scholarly sources. The score for the paper only counts toward the overall score for the student who wrote it; that is, although this is part of a group project, an individual student's score in AP Seminar is not affected by the quality of the papers written by their group members, except insofar as the group members' papers inform the group presentation.
- **Second**, the group synthesizes the information found in each individual paper and develops a presentation of 8-10 minutes, in which the group argues for its particular solution to the problem the group is investigating. At the end of the presentation, each student is asked one question relating to what they learned about research and collaboration. The presentation is scored collectively and is the only component of the entire set of activities for which a student's score in AP Seminar is affected by the work of other students.

Performance Task 2 (PT2): an individual research project that is based on at least 2 of the materials provided by the College Board in a “stimulus packet.” Unlike PT1, the work the students do in PT2 must be anchored in some clearly articulated way to the stimulus materials. But like PT1, there are two parts to PT2: a paper and a presentation with questions at the end. These are longer and more intensive, and PT2 is therefore worth more than PT1. PT2 is worth 35% of the total score, with the paper being worth 70% of that 35%, the presentation being worth 20% of that 35%, and the responses to questions being worth the remaining 10% of PT2's 35%. This activity will usually run from approximately mid-February to the end of April.

- The paper is expected to be approximately 2,000 words long and must present the student's own argument about a topic related to two of the materials from the stimulus packet. As with the paper for PT1, the paper should engage in a serious and critical way with the latest scholarly sources on the chosen topic.
- The presentation lasts 6-8 minutes and is a distillation of the main argument and issues of the paper.
- After the presentation, the student is asked 2 questions: one will focus on what the student learned from the research process itself, while the other will focus on the student's argument and what other insights may be gained from the argument.

The **final exam** is, like all AP exams, held in the first two weeks of May of each year. It consists of two parts. The first part has three short-answer questions. It asks the students to analyze a single passage of non-fiction text and identify the main points of the argument presented in that text. The second part presents four different sources, which usually include at least two non-fiction passages but could also include maps, graphs, poems, and other types of informative and/or imaginative material. In this second part, the student is required to build their own argument, drawing on at least two of the sources provided, while also incorporating insights from their own experience and interests. The final exam counts for 45% of the overall 1-5 score. The first part of the final exam constitutes 30% of that 45% (or 13.5% of the overall score), while the second part constitutes the remaining 70% of that 45% (or 31.5% of the overall score).

It should be noted that although there are separate rubrics for each of the individual components of the tasks, **students and teachers will not see the scores provided for those individual components, nor will they receive individualized feedback.** The College Board provides only a **single** score of 1-5 that incorporates everything the student has submitted. Students, teachers, and the AP Coordinator do **not** get more granular information. This is in keeping with the College Board's more general approach to AP scores, for which it is impossible to say for any given student what part of an assessment would have needed improvement in order to raise the score.

AP Seminar has proven to be a **popular** and highly **effective** course. It is **demanding**, with significant work required if a student is to excel and **firm deadlines** set by the College Board that **cannot** be adjusted. But the students who take on this challenge become **sophisticated** readers and **critical** thinkers, well prepared for the challenges they will encounter in university and in life.