

Common Place Books

AP English Language & Composition

In the five canons of rhetoric—invention, arrangement, style, memory, delivery—invention is the art of finding arguments for any situation. Ancient rhetors studied arguments surrounding important issues of their time and were well versed in arguments for **both sides** of the issue.

The rhetors developed three ways to approach invention: *kairos*, stasis theory, and the commonplaces.

Kairos has to do with ‘time and place’ or ‘circumstances’ surrounding an issue, according to Quintilian. Stasis theory is a series of systematic questions to ask regarding a topic to further illuminate, clarify, expose weaknesses, suggest proofs, and possibly indicate arrangement of an argument.

The **commonplaces** or **common topics** were knowledge or topics that are known; later, strategies for structure (arrangement) such as definition, division, compare and contrast, classification.

One objective of the AP Language class is to help students become informed on important issues of the day, similar to the ancient rhetors. Before taking a stand on an issue, it is important to know both sides. Likewise, an argument isn’t considered complete until the opposing viewpoint is acknowledged, discussed, and either shown to be invalid or have points conceded.

A **Common Place Book** will assist you in gathering **commonplaces** or **common topics**.

Each entry will consist of:

1. The date of the entry and a title.
2. An important issue in our city, our state, our country, our world. Even our universe!
3. The issue in summary form of no longer than **one** paragraph. Rubric for summary is included. Note that the topic sentence includes the title, author, and genre of source for the issue: include whether the issue is stated as a news story or an editorial.
4. If the issue is from a news article (as opposed to an opinion article or editorial) state a position on the issue. Provide a **minimum** of three proofs (evidence) to support the position. Then, state an opposing viewpoint, also with three proofs. This may be in note form.
5. If the issue is an editorial, state the publications’ position. State three proofs provided to support that position. Provide the opposing view and three proofs to support that position. Your summary should clearly state if the opposing view is included. This may be in note form.

6. Cite the source of the issue in MLA format.

The common place book will be graded using the following criteria:

- Each entry is detailing an issue of importance on a local, national, or global scale.
- The summary is complete and meets each point on the rubric.
- The summary is written in exemplary style: sentences are varied; sentences tend to be 18 words or more; style is appropriate for the occasion (middle to high—middle low only depending on the issue).
- Position of BOTH sides is clearly stated.
- THREE proofs for EACH position are listed.
- PROOFS are labeled as: logos, ethos, pathos

This assignment will continue through April. After AP testing is complete, you will continue your common place book, but there will be no criteria: any issue or topic may be included, and your response will be open-ended: a reflection, a description, an analysis, etc.

RUBRIC: Common Place Book

Summary:

- Includes title, author, genre, source, main issue
- Uses academic language
- Style is middle: not highfalutin, not colloquial except for effect
- Syntax is controlled
- Main points are clear
- Transitions are clearly indicated
- Grammar, usage, and spelling are correct
- Information is correct
- Flawed reasoning is identified (if necessary)

Sample Entry for Common Place Book AP English Language

Summary

In the *New York Times* editorial “The Mayor and Gay Marriage”, New York City’s Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s opposition to a state judge’s ruling that gay marriage was legal in New York City is applauded. The Mayor reiterated his personal support for gay marriage while condemning the judge’s ruling, causing critics to accuse the Mayor of trying to please all constituents. However, the editorial agrees that the Mayor had little choice but to oppose the ruling. First, the judge’s decision conflicts with a previous state ruling forbidding gay marriage. The editorial points out that legal confusion ensuing from diverging rulings is not in anyone’s best interest. Also, the state has no residency requirement, which would invite gay couples from out of town to flock to New York City. The Mayor, according to the editorial, demonstrated judiciousness in asking the state’s highest court to hear the issue as soon as possible. The editorial asserts that a denial of gay marriage by the high court will need “a legitimate reason” and looks to Mr. Bloomberg as a powerful voice supporting a law granting gay couples the right to marry.

Arguments condemning Mr. Bloomberg’s position

POSITION STATEMENT:
Mr. Bloomberg committed political suicide by opposing a ruling by a state judge allowing gay marriage in New York City.

He will lose the gay vote
pathos

He looks ‘wishy-washy’ by personally supporting but not allowing
ethos (pathos)

He lost revenue in the city by keeping gay couples from coming for marriage
logos

Arguments supporting Mr. Bloomberg’s position

POSITION STATEMENT:
Mr. Bloomberg showed political judiciousness in opposing a ruling by a state judge allowing gay Marriage in New York City.

he will clarify the law and by doing so, avoid having hundreds marriages that could possibly later be challenged and ruled illegal
pathos

legal ruling will clear up confusion as to what marriage is
pathos

his personal support could help sway the high court
ethos