2026

AP® Research Academic Paper

Scoring Guidelines

© 2026 College Board. College Board, Advanced Placement, AP, AP Central, and the acorn logo are registered trademarks of College Board. AP Capstone is a trademark owned by College Board. Visit College Board on the web: collegeboard.org.

AP Central is the official online home for the AP Program: apcentral.collegeboard.org.

Academic Paper — 5 points

Score of 1 **Report on Existing Knowledge**	Score of 2 **Report on Existing Knowledge with Simplistic Use of a Research Method**	Score of 3 **Ineffectual Argument for a New Understanding**	Score of 4 **Well-Supported, Articulate Argument Conveying a New Understanding**	Score of 5 **Rich Analysis of a New Understanding Addressing a Gap in the Research Base**
• Presents an overly broad topic of inquiry.	• Presents a topic of inquiry with narrowing scope or focus, that is NOT carried through either in the method or in the overall line of reasoning.	• Carries the focus or scope of a topic of inquiry through the method AND overall line of reasoning, even though the focus or scope might still be narrowing.	• Focuses a topic of inquiry with clear and narrow parameters, which are addressed through the method and the conclusion.	• Focuses a topic of inquiry with clear and narrow parameters, which are addressed through the method and the conclusion.
• Situates a topic of inquiry within a single perspective derived from scholarly works OR through a variety of perspectives derived from mostly non-scholarly works.	• Situates a topic of inquiry within a single perspective derived from scholarly works OR through a variety of perspectives derived from mostly non-scholarly works.	• Situates a topic of inquiry within relevant scholarly works of varying perspectives, although connections to some works may be unclear.	• Explicitly connects a topic of inquiry to relevant scholarly works of varying perspectives AND logically explains how the topic of inquiry addresses a gap.	• Explicitly connects a topic of inquiry to relevant scholarly works of varying perspectives AND logically explains how the topic of inquiry addresses a gap.
• Describes a search and report process.	• Describes a nonreplicable research method OR provides an oversimplified description of a method, with questionable alignment to the purpose of the inquiry.	• Describes a reasonably replicable research method, with questionable alignment to the purpose of the inquiry.	• Logically defends the alignment of a detailed, replicable research method to the purpose of the inquiry.	• Logically defends the alignment of a detailed, replicable research method to the purpose of the inquiry.
• Summarizes or reports existing knowledge in the field of understanding pertaining to the topic of inquiry.	• Summarizes or reports existing knowledge in the field of understanding pertaining to the topic of inquiry.	• Conveys a new understanding or conclusion, with an underdeveloped line of reasoning OR insufficient evidence.	• Supports a new understanding or conclusion through a logically organized line of reasoning AND sufficient evidence. The limitations and/or implications, if present, of the new understanding or conclusion are oversimplified.	• Justifies a new understanding or conclusion through a logical progression of inquiry choices, sufficient evidence, explanation of the limitations of the conclusion, and an explanation of the implications to the community of practice.
• Generally communicates the student's ideas, although errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization distract or confuse the reader.	• Generally communicates the student's ideas, although errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization distract or confuse the reader.	• Competently communicates the student's ideas, although there may be some errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization.	• Competently communicates the student's ideas, although there may be some errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization.	• Enhances the communication of the student's ideas through organization, use of design elements, conventions of grammar, style, mechanics, and word precision, with few to no errors.
• Cites AND/OR attributes sources (in bibliography/works cited and/or in text), with multiple errors and/or an inconsistent use of a discipline-specific style.	• Cites AND/OR attributes sources (in bibliography/works cited and/or in text), with multiple errors and/or an inconsistent use of a discipline-specific style.	• Cites AND attributes sources, using a discipline-specific style (in both bibliography/works cited AND in text), with few errors or inconsistencies.	• Cites AND attributes sources, with a consistent use of an appropriate discipline-specific style (in both bibliography/works cited AND in text), with few to no errors.	• Cites AND attributes sources, with a consistent use of an appropriate discipline-specific style (in both bibliography/works cited AND in text), with few to no errors.

© 2026 College Board.
Visit College Board on the web: **collegeboard.org**.

Scoring Notes:

- The Academic Paper should be in the format of a discipline-specific paper. Any off-task format of the Academic Paper submitted as final in the Digital Portfolio (e.g., a PowerPoint presentation) will receive a score of 0.
- Academic papers that fall outside the required word-count range are unlikely to earn a score of 3. Papers containing fewer than 4,000 words are evaluated for completeness and to determine whether they demonstrate sufficient depth, development, and supporting evidence to meet the assessment criteria. For papers exceeding 5,000 words, only the first 5,500 words are evaluated, and the paper will also be assessed for concision and focus.

© 2026 College Board.
Visit College Board on the web: **collegeboard.org**.