

AP English Literature Exam Essays

1. Underline the significant words of the prompt.
2. What is author's purpose and main idea? What issues and/or ideas does the passage/poem explore? You need to focus your introduction on these ideas.
3. Note patterns and repetitions with the text: imagery, diction (vivid and clearly positive or negative), figurative language, pronoun use). Identify focused *quotations* from the passage/poem that are significant (but limited to 3-7 words), ones that you will analyze and use effectively for evidence in support of meaning.
4. How does the passage or poem mean? What primary *literary devices* does the author use to reveal or reinforce meaning? (Focus on no more than three devices.) Do not discuss any literary devices or details that are not directly related to meaning.
5. What is the *tone(s)* of the passage? What are the author's and the speaker's attitudes, and are they different? Does the tone *shift* or change, even subtly?
6. What opposition exists in the passage or poem? Identify specific examples of opposing images, characters, settings, situations, and stylistic elements. (Remember that opposition is crucial to complexity—which is central to the AP Exam.)
Examples:
 - naïve character in contrast to sophisticated character
 - setting that begins in parlor and ends at a camp side (inside vs. outside)
 - intellectual style that probes an unrefined character or topic
 - simple scene described with complicated imagery
 - physical elements contrasted with spiritual concepts
7. What is the *theme*? What does the passage or poem reveal about human nature or the human condition? Why does the central concept or issue of the text continue to be important to human existence today? Make sure to include these ideas in your conclusion.
8. Compose a thesis that identifies central topic, recognizes complexity, and states theme.

In the _____, _____, _____, _____
(specific genre) (title punctuated properly) (author) (reflects upon, examines)

_____, highlighting the tension between _____ and _____,
(idea, issue, or problem) (central opposition) (central opposition)

and ultimately revealing _____.
(THEME, statement about the human condition that transcends setting)

9. Do not feel compelled to compose a five-paragraph essay. Focus on constructing two body paragraphs determined by the central oppositions in the text OR the *structure* of the text (pre-*shift* and post-*shift*). Begin each body paragraph with a *topic sentence* that clearly asserts the central idea of your paragraph.

General Suggestions

- Avoid first person in your response. Use objective third person instead.
- Understand the holistic grading system:
 - * Did the student understand what he or she read?
 - * Did the student answer the question asked?
 - * How well is the essay written?
- Don't be a critic or supporter of the work or the prompt; answer the prompt, and don't evaluate the work's merit.
- Remember that style matters: use apt and specific vocabulary and literary terminology.