

ADVANCED PLACEMENT ESSAYS: HELPFUL HINTS

1. Don't present yourself as an immature writer

- AP readers see beyond handwriting to the larger issues of style and content, but handwriting can reflect problems.
- Is the handwriting so excessively large or small that it is difficult to decipher?
- Is the handwriting excessively florid?
- If you have poor, difficult to read handwriting, strive to be certain the writing is clear enough to read.
- AP readers must grade 20+ essays an hour and your handwriting may affect attentiveness. Don't make it difficult for the reader to "see" your thinking
- Brief, scant responses are the worse error you can make as the AP reader is left with no way to evaluate your ability.

2. Avoid those serious errors, which will mark you as an unprepared writer.

- A very serious error is repeated comma splices – running two independent clauses together without a conjunction and with only a comma. (Run-on sentences omit the comma and present the same problem.)
- Another serious error is repeated occurrences of sentence fragments.
- Spelling errors are serious, but a few are acceptable; too many may cost you points. Spelling errors combined with a lack of sentence control are more apt to count against you.
- Errors of usage – e.g., *affect/effect* – affect how the readers evaluate your language competence.

3. Write sentences that are smooth, flowing, clear, sensible; avoid short, choppy sentences.

- Proofread to ensure that you have not omitted words that render sentences unclear or nonsensical.
- Proofread to make sure that your wording is not so confused, awkward, or ineffective that the reader cannot figure out what you are saying.
- Sentences which are sharp, precise, and clear but which at the same time show complexity characterize the best writing. Sentences whose structures enable you to express intricate, layered understandings effectively will mark you as a mature and capable writer.
- A fluent, clear style is a primary characteristic of higher level writing.
- Use sentence variety to develop a more sophisticated style.

4. Pay attention to organization and content: THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES.

- Respond exactly to the question asked. The literature and questions are logical and focused. Your answer is in the question. Accept that guidance; interpret and illustrate the question
- Keep your focus clear throughout your essay; make certain the thoughts are in a logical sequence that is continually connected to the focus, thus yielding a unified essay.
- Use specific details both to offer commentary and interpretation about the literary piece and to support and illustrate your points.
- Explain through examples and comments on the details of the text.

8-9

These well-written essays choose an appropriate work of literature and respond clearly and convincingly to the prompt. Superior papers will be specific and knowledgeable in their references, cogent in their development, and free from plot summary which is not clearly connected to the central focus. They need not be written without flaw, but they must demonstrate the writer's ability to discuss a literary work with insight and understanding and to control a wide range of the elements of effective composition.

6-7

These essays also analyze an appropriate work; they respond to the prompt but are less perceptive and/or specific than 8-9 papers. Also, their responses are less convincing than the best responses. These essays are well-written, but with less maturity and control than are the top papers. They demonstrate an ability to analyze a literary work, but reveal a less sophisticated analysis and command of the elements of effective writing than essays scored in the 8-9 range.

5

Superficiality characterizes these essays. They choose an appropriate work but the explanation of the work is vague or over-simplified. Their discussion may be pedestrian, mechanical, or inadequately related to the work. These essays may demonstrate inconsistent control over the elements of composition and are not as well-conceived, organized, or developed as the upper-half papers; the writing, however, is sufficient to convey the writer's ideas.

3-4

These lower half papers may have chosen an inappropriate text or failed to adequately respond to the question. The analysis may be unpersuasive, perfunctory, underdeveloped, or misguided. The writing may convey the writer's ideas, but it reveals weak control over such elements as organization, diction, syntax or grammar. These essays may also contain significant misinterpretations of the text, contain little, if any supporting evidence, and/or summarize plot at the expense of analysis.

1-2

These essays compound the weaknesses in the 3-4 range. They seriously misread the work or the question. In addition they are poorly written on several counts including many distracting errors in grammar and mechanics, or are unacceptably brief. The writer may have made an attempt to answer the question but little more. The views presented have little clarity or coherence.

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