

Essay Tips

- Don't use numerals for numbers. Don't say "3"; say "three."
- Don't inappropriately evaluate the author's skills, i.e., don't say that the author is talented or clever or an excellent writer, as you are not in a position to say so, and your job is more to analyze the work than to review it. You don't want to come off as arrogant, condescending or inexperienced in analysis.
- Don't circumlocute or flatter or provide unnecessary commentary. Don't substitute a lack of deep analysis with filler.
- Don't write a conclusion, as conclusions are unnecessary.
- Don't simply state that a literary element or device/technique exists. State WHY it exists. Expound upon its EFFECTS. Don't summarize the poem; analyze it.
- Don't employ the word "use" to describe a literary element, such as diction, which is present in every text. An author doesn't "use" diction or structure or any other literary element the way he might use a literary device/technique. An author might employ a certain **type** of diction, such as that which alludes to farming or space exploration or mathematics. Similarly, an author doesn't "use" structure, though he might employ a **particular** structure, such as that which is unique to a villanelle, sonnet, cento or rondeau. CORRECT EXAMPLE: The author's choice to confine his speaker's love to the somewhat rigid structure of the villanelle suggests the paradox that while love affords people certain freedoms -- for example, love frees the spirit from the hell of loneliness, it does come with some rules.
- Don't confuse rhetoric with literature. The goal of rhetoric is to persuade, while the goal of literature is to affect a reader's sensibilities. While some of the devices, or techniques, such as anaphora, might be used in both rhetoric and literature, because this is literature class, and you are analyzing literature, call it a literary device, not a rhetorical device. (Unless, of course, the literature you are reading is about a lawyer who uses a particular rhetorical device within the story that is of some overall thematic significance.)
- Continue to write pithy introductions that concisely state your position and demonstrate your overall prowess. Make a strong first impression, which does impact the AP reader. Just don't flatter, pander or employ the oft-used essay technique, caca de torro.
- Analyze how a literary element or device **functions** in the piece. Discuss the **effects** it has upon the rest of the text and/or the reader.
- Use high-level vocabulary, including literary terms, precisely and correctly.
- Avoid vague and subjective words, such as "beautiful," "imaginative" and "unique," and flowery adverbs that smack more of personal review than scholarly analysis.
- Stay focused on the question posed, not on the question you wish were posed. Make sure that your thesis and supporting commentary work together to solidly answer the question.
- Be consistent with verb tense. Typically, it is effective to write about a work in the present tense, as if it were unfolding now. EXAMPLE: The author, via consonance, and, specifically, repeated "k" sounds: "flicker upon bark all too quick unto mark" (33) emphasizes the speaker's persistent frustration and incapacity to free himself of his self-loathing.
- Write as neatly as possible with no cross-outs or arrows. Your job is to please the reader, not confound her. The reader will not spend much time fishing for your brilliance, and she will certainly not appreciate your having insisted that she do so. **Make it easy for your reader to grant you a high score.**

