

PATTERNS IN QUESTIONS: AP LITERATURE

POETRY

1. Whether stated or not, every poetry analysis question expects a response to include discussion of meaning or purpose (sometimes disguised as effect, tone, theme, mood, point of view).
2. In most cases, the meaning and/or purpose (or mood, tone, point of view) should be explained by an analysis of diction, imagery, and/or structure (or, possibly, syntax, punctuation, audience). The best papers always make a clear connection between the parts being analyzed and the meaning of the poem.
3. **No knowledge of terminology is necessary for top scores**, but familiarity with terms may allow the student to use precision as well as shortcuts in discussion and analysis. It should be noted that students are expected to use the language appropriate to the genre about which they are writing—e.g., not refer to paragraphs when they mean stanzas.
4. Comfortable and appropriate use of **brief** quotations is expected in upper half papers.
5. When a comparison/contrast is asked for, the best papers generally comment on meaning first, then go on to integrate references to diction, imagery, and structure into their analysis to demonstrate their point. The best papers do not do this in a mechanical or formulaic manner.

PROSE

1. Most questions expect the students to understand the attitude of the speaker in the text and, if different, the point of view of the author. The best papers understand the difference between the author and the persona of the text. *n.b.*: Works relying on irony are often misunderstood and taken literally.
2. Attitude, meaning, and/or point of view are usually to be supported by a discussion of style--e.g., diction, syntax, imagery--and structure. Brief supporting quotations from the text are expected in upper half papers.
3. Some questions expect the student to follow the reasoning/arguments of the writer although these tend to appear more on the Language exam than on the Literature.

OPEN QUESTION

These questions ask students to draw on their reading experience. The only requirement is that the work be of literary merit, but this is a very broad category and much is forgiven. An essay that appears to be based on a film version of the work, however, will not be given serious consideration and will **not** receive an upper half score regardless of the depth of thought and quality of the writing. Virtually all questions ask for an analysis based on some aspect of the following:

1. CHARACTER--e.g., behavior, change, development (or lack thereof), function;
2. MOOD--e.g., absurdity, burlesque, comedy, farce, irony, melodrama, pathos, tragedy;
3. PLOT--e.g., action (and its development), beginning/ending, climax, conflict (i.e., self, society, nature);
4. SETTING--e.g., place, time;
5. STRUCTURE--e.g., circular, episodic, flashback, frame, linear, parallel;
6. STYLE--e.g., allusion, diction, imagery, pace, sounds, symbols, syntax, tense, voice;
7. THEME(S)
8. TONE--e.g., attitude, aura, implication, intonation, voice. Occasionally overlaps with mood.

DO's and NEVER DO's

for those taking the AP English Literature and Composition Exam

DO.....

1. read the prompt very carefully, spending quality time trying to figure out what is really being asked for;
2. pay close attention to the spelling of the names and words in the prompt;
3. write in black or dark blue ink;
4. feel free to scratch out, but try not to create an unreadable mess;
5. make a concerted effort to write legibly;
6. give yourself a minute or two (at least) to reread/proofread your essay;
7. use the vocabulary with which you are comfortable (assuming it is standard English);
8. use, but do not show off, the vocabulary of literary analysis;
9. learn the difference between Old, Middle, and Modern English;
10. know the differences between a sonnet, ode, elegy, eulogy, epic, dramatic monologue, and mock heroic poem if you are going to use the terms;
11. use appropriate and brief supporting quotations and details;
12. learn language to discuss tone;
13. learn how to punctuate titles of poems, short stories, plays, and novels;
14. study history and learn literary contexts.

NEVER.....

1. refer to anything written before you were conscious as old or ancient (including the English language) unless you genuinely understand the literature and culture of antiquity;
2. make up words to suit the occasion (e.g., "apostrophical");
3. refer to a plaintive tone as pleaing, or respectfully as respectfully;
4. refer to diction as a device;
5. refer to a stanza as a paragraph or an epic poem as a novel;
6. use terminology that is unnatural to your writing;
7. refer to Elizabethan, Italian, Shakespearean, or Petrarchan sonnets unless you fully understand the distinctions and can relate these references to the meaning of the work to be analyzed;
8. list rhyme schemes;
9. refer to rhymed couplets unless you really understand them and their relevance to meaning;
10. refer to meter unless you understand the concept thoroughly and can relate your discussion to meaning;
11. use the word "plethora" or the play, *Hamlet*, on an AP English exam;
12. confuse penmanship with writing;
13. underline titles of poems unless they are epic poems;
14. ignore the content of footnotes when they are provided in the question;
15. use "laid back" and "flow" as descriptions of a writer's style;
16. pile up long quotations;
17. think that repeating the prompt is answering the question;
18. make judgments about the quality of the text(s) which you are analyzing unless the question directs you to do so.