

Writing essays for the AP Exam

There are 3 essays. One on a prose passage, one on a poetry passage, and an open-response essay on a work that you select. You have 2 hours to complete all three essays. **The essays are the best place to increase your overall AP score.** Each essay is scored from zero to nine. High-scoring essays are clear essays. Middle-scoring essays are generic and boring. Low-scoring essays are bad.

Ideas about literary works

1. What is the meaning of the work?
 - A. What is the literal meaning?
 - B. What feeling(s) does the work evoke?
2. How does the author communicate that meaning?
 - A. What are the important images in the work? What do those images suggest?
 - B. What specific words or short phrases produce the strongest feelings?
 - C. What elements are in opposition?

The Classic Essay Question: Read the following work carefully. Then, write a well-organized essay in which you discuss the manner in which the author conveys his ideas and meaning. Discuss the techniques the author uses to make this passage effective. Avoid summary.

The Hidden questions: 1. What does the poem or passage mean? 2. How did the author get you to see that? 3. How do the answers to 1 and 2 direct you to adequately answer the question?

Avoid Summary. Absolutely. If you discuss the way emotions are involved in the story and focus on the feelings the language produces, you'll be discussing meaning in the right way. Always identify **point of view**, **tone**, and **figurative language**. Discussing these elements will ensure you are moving beyond summary.

Variations on the Classic Essay Question

You might be asked to “discuss the narrator’s attitude toward the nature of war,” “the speaker’s attitude toward society,” or “the author’s use of repetition.”

Use a literary vocabulary

For poetry, the big five are *diction*, *imagery*, *metaphor*, *rhyme* and *form*.

For prose, the big five are *diction*, *imagery*, *metaphor*, *point of view*, and *characterization*.