

AP Literature – Essay Writing Basics

1. Refer to works of literature in the PRESENT TENSE. Refer to historical events in the PAST TENSE.
2. Be CONSISTENT in use of tense.
3. Use THIRD PERSON point of view whenever possible. Occasionally, FIRST PERSON POV is acceptable. SECOND PERSON (“you”) is almost never appropriate in academic writing.
4. Answer ALL aspects of the prompt thoroughly – including any aspect that is implied but unstated.
5. Use TRANSITION WORDS to indicate shifts or connections between paragraphs (*for example, in addition, furthermore, likewise, accordingly...*).
6. Use VARIETY in your WORD CHOICE.
7. Use VARIETY in your SENTENCE LENGTH.
8. Avoid exotic, polysyllabic words if simple, precise words will do.
9. ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY WORDS.
10. When referring to the meaning of a passage, never assume the author is the speaker. Instead, refer to the “speaker,” “narrator,” or “persona.”
11. Never use a quotation all by itself. Introduce and explain all quotations. (and cite!)
12. Every time an assertion (original analysis) is made, it should be accompanied by SPECIFIC EVIDENCE / SUPPORT.
13. AVOID SUMMARY.
14. Answer *WHY*, not *WHAT*.
15. Identify the TITLE of the passage being discussed. Use QUOTATION MARKS for smaller publications such as songs, poems, articles, and essays; use UNDERLINE (or italics) for larger works such as novels, plays, films, and extended epic poems.
16. Identify the AUTHOR of the passage being discussed. Use the author’s FULL NAME the first time it is used, then refer to the author by his or her LAST NAME on all subsequent occurrences.