

## PROSE ESSAY TIPS

1. Read the prompt carefully and figure out the heart of the prompt first. **Underline or box the tasks** the prompt wants you to do. Make a numbered list of these tasks. Make sure you know what you should be looking for as you read the passage. Close read the passage, slowly, hearing your voice as you read. **Identify the heart of the prompt** and write it somewhere on the paper. Complete a sentence that **answers the heart of the prompt FIRST before looking for devices.**
2. As you read, mark up the passage. For example, underline important phrases and words, circle main ideas, write notes in the margins. How you mark up the passage is up to you, but you **should** get into the routine of doing it.
3. Briefly outline (with a few words or phrases) how you will approach your essay. This should include a thesis statement that addresses the **HEART** of the prompt. You don't have a lot of time, so when I say briefly, I mean it. This process should take no more than 5 minutes. *Make sure that the ideas in your outline effectively address all parts of the prompt.* **Remember: method makes meaning.**
4. Write your essay. As you do, remember the following:
  - Your introduction should include a thesis statement and **perhaps** another sentence or you're your thesis statement can be more than one sentence, and it's up to you whether or not you include your line of reasoning in your intro (road map.) **Refrain from writing long, elaborate introductions.** Doing so will eat up your writing time, may lead you off topic, and will fail to earn you any points. **A strong thesis statement is all you really need.**
  - Include quotes from the passage to support your statements. **Quote early and often.** Quote specific words/phrases (important diction, important dialogue, imagery, symbols, syntax, literary elements, etc.) to **support your thesis.** If the prompt asks for you to address specific elements, remember that you can be assured there are examples of those elements within the passage, but you do **NOT** have to focus on those elements. Remember that **specificity** is often the difference between a merely competent essay and an outstanding essay. **Use snippets of quotes**, not long quotes.
  - Remember that you need not limit yourself to the elements listed in the prompt. Make sure you discuss at least two elements in depth (lots of examples), preferably three per body paragraph.
  - **Organize your essay according to the HEART of the prompt, not by devices.**
  - Paragraphs should follow the **TREX(EX)(EX)** format – at least two examples and explanations of **HOW** those examples support your thesis per paragraph.
  - Vary your sentence structure to make for more sophisticated writing and more interesting reading. Be specific. Avoid general (vague) statements.
  - Periodically check over (quick glance) what you've written and what your thesis states to ensure you are addressing the topic.
  - Use transitions between paragraphs and within paragraphs to achieve a logical "flow" of ideas. Write in the present tense and maintain it throughout the paper.
  - Address the "so what" factor. For example, in addition to discussing where and how the author uses imagery, discuss what **the effect of the imagery is** (and don't simply say it's to paint a picture for the reader). Usually the "so what" factor has to do with the theme and the effect literary devices have on the reader.
  - If time permits, craft a concluding paragraph. Don't sacrifice your body paragraphs for a conclusion, though. You may simply write a concluding statement if that is all you have time for. Put it in its own paragraph, and make it memorable.
5. Go back and reread the prompt. Then proofread your paper. You should be using all 40 minutes and writing **NO** less than 2 pages.

Here are the most common literary devices one can find in prose passages:

- ✓ selection of detail
- ✓ diction
- ✓ dialogue
- ✓ inner dialogue
- ✓ tone
- ✓ juxtaposition (contrast)
- ✓ imagery
- ✓ figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole)
- ✓ syntax
- ✓ punctuation
- ✓ symbolism

\***REMEMBER:** the prose passage always focuses on some aspect of characterization. The ways that authors indirectly develop characters are as follows:

**S** = what the character SAYS

**A** = the character's appearance and environment (how do these factors develop the character?)

**T** = the character's thoughts (both directly stated and implied through facial expressions, reactions, etc.)

**D** = what does the character DO? (What do his/her actions suggest about inner character?)

**O** = what others think/say about the character

If you look at the **SATDO elements**, you should be able to glean some great insight about the character, on multiple levels.

FINALLY...remember the new rubric

**1 point** = **strong thesis statement** that addresses the heart of the prompt

**4 points** = **evidence AND commentary** (address the heart of the prompt with multiple, specific examples and be certain to name the literary elements you're looking at and specify **HOW** the author uses them to create meaning.)

**1 point** = **sophistication** (aim for sophisticated writing: so spicy verbs, precise adjectives, some fancy words here and there; varied sentence length and structure)

- **AND** try to look at the complexities within the passage, as this will help ensure you're building a complex literary argument.
- If you see an alternate point of view that you think not everyone will notice and you can prove it, go for it. The AP readers like it when students take risks.

