

# Essay Writing Tips

- Do not refer to the authors by their first names. In the intro, refer to the author by both names, then henceforth use the last name. The only time you might refer to the author by the first name is when the author writes about a childhood experience (like Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*).
- Spell out words like *and*, *with*, and *because* (not &, w/, and b/c). This is an important international exam, not a note to a pal.
- Avoid clichés – “You can't judge a book by its cover,” “A picture's worth a thousand words,” etc. Too many students use them, and they set the reader's teeth on edge.
- Avoid meaningless statements like “paints a picture in the reader's mind.” Too many students use it, and it doesn't say anything. Identify and explain the effect or tone the author is creating. Notice “and explain” – identifying is not enough.
- Stick to the analysis of the essay. Do not wander off into your personal experiences.
- Annotate the text and write a brief outline before you begin writing.
- Do not define terms. The readers are experienced AP teachers and English professors. They do not need to be told a simile is a comparison using like or as.
- Do not waste time on a long or fancy intro. Throw away the bread and get to the meat.

## Helpful Hints

1. **Do not present yourself as an immature writer:**
  - AP readers see beyond handwriting to the larger issues of style and content, but handwriting can reflect problems.
  - Is the handwriting so excessively large or small that it is difficult to decipher?
  - If you have poor, difficult to read handwriting, strive to be certain the writing is clear enough to read.
  - AP readers must grade 20+ essays an hour and your handwriting may affect attentiveness. Do not make it difficult for the reader to “see” your thinking
  - Brief, scant responses are the worst error you can make, as the AP reader is left with no way to evaluate your ability.
2. **Avoid these serious errors, which will mark you as an unprepared writer:**
  - A very serious error is repeated comma splices – running two independent clauses together without a conjunction and with only a comma. (Run-on sentences omit the comma and present the same problem.)
  - Another serious error is repeated occurrences of sentence fragments.
  - Spelling errors are serious, but a few are acceptable; too many may cost you points. Spelling errors combined with a lack of sentence control are more apt to count against you.
  - Errors of usage – e.g., affect/effect – affect how the readers evaluate your language competence.
3. **Write sentences that are smooth, flowing, clear, sensible; avoid short, choppy sentences.**
  - Proofread to ensure that you have not omitted words that render sentences unclear or nonsensical.
  - Proofread to make sure that your wording is not so confused, awkward, or ineffective that the reader cannot figure out what you are saying.
  - Sentences that are sharp, precise, and clear, and, at the same time, show complexity characterize the best writing.
  - A fluent, clear style is a primary characteristic of higher level writing.
  - Use sentence variety to develop a more sophisticated style.

4. **Pay attention to organization and content:**

- Respond exactly to the question asked. The literature and questions are logical and focused. Your answer is in the question. Accept that guidance; interpret and illustrate the question.
- Keep your focus clear throughout your essay; make certain the thoughts are in a logical sequence that is continually connected to the focus point of the argument, thus yielding a unified essay.
- Use specific details both to offer commentary and interpretation about the literary piece and to support and illustrate your points.
- Explain thoroughly all examples and comments on the details of the text.
- Plan to spend about five minutes brainstorming, and structuring your response; then write from your outline or list of ideas. Think through your whole answer before you begin.
- Once you begin writing, try to maintain a continuous, logical, and focused flow. You may have new insights as you proceed, but try to connect continually where you began, where you are, and where you are going with your central idea.