

MATURE ACADEMIC WRITING IN AP ENGLISH

Outstanding Writing - The following descriptions of the conventions of writing are expected in ALL writing assignments. Students must review these characteristics and strive to incorporate them into all written work.

Sentence Style

Outstanding sentence style in an essay is characterized by varied structure; sentences are fluent and flowing. Sentences convey the clear, individualized voice of a writer who has a keen sense for writing style. Effective word choices, a command of language, and a mature use of vocabulary combined with skillfully structured syntax to create sentences that are striking.

Organization

Effectively organized writing contains a controlling idea and a coherent structure. The controlling idea shapes the writing, and effective transitions and connectives bind ideas together meaningfully. This writing is well developed with mature, full paragraphs (or sentences) that include references – examples and illustrations that are skillfully integrated into the writer’s own interpretive language – from a text, historical event, etc. Effective organization is a combination of sound generalities supported through elaboration with details and examples.

Quality of Thinking

Effective writing, above all else, shows evidence of a high quality of intellectual engagement with the topic and support (evidence). The writer is comfortable with mode-specific terminology and is able to apply analytical principles to show, for example, how meaning is enhanced through technique. This writing shows creative insight; the writer has fresh, original ideas that are stimulating and enlightening even to a professional audience. Most importantly, the best writing reveals that the writer is a person who is mature, sensitive, and wise. The writer who is focused as a human being creates well-focused, sensitively written, intelligent writing

-modified from Duke University Press publication

Grading Guidelines for Written Work - *The following has been modified from a description by Dr. Glenn Arbery, journalist, author, editor, and fellow of The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.*

An A paper is a real addition to understanding, whether in terms of its **mastery of the thought** on the subject or its **original contribution** to it. It goes beyond anything that might be expected. It surprises and delights. It has the unmistakable tang of inner drive, an air of enjoying its own freedom. At the same time, it exhibits a mastery of the formal excellences, or failing this mastery, it brings to light some excellence that makes one forget its absence.

A B paper is good enough, but not excellent. It has a **formal wholeness** and some qualities of finer understanding. It represents conventional achievement, rather than a breakthrough into its own freedom. It demonstrates everywhere a desire to do well. If the *A* usually rewards either a self-forgetful joy or a conscious pride in excellence, the *B* reflects a moral pride or conscientiousness.

A high C paper is what one might expect of the average attempt: by analogy, the competence of the **average** athlete or singer. It is not exactly unsatisfactory, but it lacks a sense of the beauty of achievement, and therefore lacks the ambition to be more than what it is.

Maturity of Voice - The following examples and explanations come from a variety of AP and honors teachers and conferences, most notably, Valerie Stevens from Patrick Henry High School.

Missteps on the Road to “Mature Academic Style” 1. Regurgitating the prompt (aka: empty openings). 2. Lack of planning. 3. Generalizations instead of analysis. 4. Summary instead of analysis. 5. Actually anything instead of analysis. 6. Formulaic writing, (aka: a writer on autopilot instead of “a mind at work,” “a writer engaged with text”). 7. General carelessness: not differentiating between a poet and a speaker, between a character and a person, between an audience (for a play) and a reader (for text); not spelling words right that are in the prompt, or not getting characters names right; not stating ideas precisely. 8. Over-simplifying what is complex. 9. Filling the paper with quoted material instead of analysis (commentary). 10. Failing to develop ideas.

Special Detractors from “Mature Academic Voice”

1. **Use of first person.** Avoid “I think,” “I believe,” “To me this means...” Note: used sparingly, first person can be appropriate in either the argument or synthesis questions on the AP exam since the student writer has been asked to create a position or assert an opinion. First person is usually NOT acceptable for Question 2, passage analysis, since this is considered an analytic academic essay. In this instance, the first person violates the accepted conventions for formal academic writing.

2. **Use of second person “you.”** Avoid the use of the second person. Not: “When you die...” Instead use: “When humans die...” Not: “The slant rhyme makes you notice...” Instead use: “The slant rhyme makes the reader notice...” Not “If you confessed to being a witch...”

3. **Colloquial speech and immature, excessively informal vocabulary.** Examples: “Your average Joe,” “Joe College,” “Back in the olden days,” “came back to bite her,” “totally off the charts,” “Nowadays,” “A bunch of...a ton of...a huge amount of...” (Does the writer mean “a significant number...a great degree...?”); “I would have to say...” (Not really); “That would have to be...” (Again, not really); “He got off...” (Rather than the more elevated: “He escaped justice...”); “really hassled by” (Suggestion: “agitated by”).

4. **Use of psychobabble:** “Pap destroyed Huck’s self-esteem.” “The peer pressure on Hester Prynne...” “Gatsby was depressed by...” “Huck and Jim’s life-style on the raft...” “Ok, so Medea had an anger management issue...” “Virginia Woolf, herself a depressed person, writes a rather bi-polar essay.”

5. **Use of absolutes:** “all,” “always,” “never,” “none,” “nobody,” “everybody” “I’ll bet 99.99% of the people...”

6. **Excesses of tone**: hysterical, breathless, indignant, self-righteous, cute, breezy, etc.
Example: “If a homeless man even talks he gets arrested.” Purple prose is a special sub-genre of this category.
7. **Cheerleading**, a special kind of excess of tone when the student lavishes praise on an author or her work. Examples: “The greatest poet...” “Does a magnificent job of...” “...so awesome,” “obviously a genius,” “...will affect me for the rest of my life.” (Note: this observation is not intended to squelch true passion or heart-felt response to literature.)
8. **Silly, weak, childish examples**: students’ lack of discernment with regard to quality of examples or evidence; using cartoons, Disney movies, etc. as legitimate evidence.
9. **Rhetorical questions**, especially those with an indignant response, such as: “Do we Americans have to put up with this? I think not!”
10. **Clichés**, all of them. They’re as old as the hills.
11. **Exclamation points**, especially lots of them!!!!
12. **Most adverbs**, such as “basically, obviously, surely, certainly, very, really, incredibly, totally,” etc. should be used sparingly!
13. **Writing about the author and speaker or narrator as though they are the same**.
Weak: Dickinson greets death as a courtly suitor. Stronger: The speaker greets Death as a courtly suitor.
14. **Misspelling the author’s name**, although I am partial to “Whit Waltman.”
15. **Referring to authors by their first names**. Please use “Whitman and Dickinson,” never “Walt and Emily,” unless, of course, you know either of them very well. And let’s not call him Author Miller.
16. **Writing about an author’s life rather than his or her work or specific purpose in a text**. Weak: “Whitman and Dickinson write about death differently due to their different life experiences.” Better: “Dickinson chooses this image to...” or “Whitman’s imagery suggests...”
17. **Using technical vocabulary incorrectly, inflated purple prose**. Examples: “Green uses emotional syntax.” “She uses dictional phrases like...” “His short fragments are all connected by commas and collaborated into a few run-on sentences.”

18. **Gobbledygook, usually some kind of combination of the characteristics listed above.** It imitates pretentious writing but says little. Examples: “The author brilliantly uses a hyphen in order to emphasize and reinforce motivation and justice that God provides and installs in each and every man.” “Meger (sic) imagery provided by the author commences to place a precedence (sic) of their style, a conventional rhetoric that gives the passage somewhat of a quixotic tone.”

So what is the successful AP student writer to do?

College Board’s Course Description says that “stylistic maturity...is characterized by the following:

- A wide-ranging vocabulary used with denotative accuracy and connotative resourcefulness;
- A variety of sentence structures, including appropriate use of subordinate and coordinate constructions;
- A logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques of coherence such as repetition, transitions, and emphasis’
- A balance of generalization with specific illustrative detail; and
- An effective use of rhetoric, including controlling tone, maintaining a consistent voice, and achieving emphasis through parallelism and antithesis.”

AP English Literature and Composition, 2005-2006 Professional Development Workshop

-V. Stevenson, reprint 5/30/12 Patrick HenryHighSchool

34 Danger Zones of Writing

1. **Don’t use the verb “to be,” such as “is,” “are,” “was,” “were,” and “am.”**

No: We were at the park.

Yes: We played Frisbee at the Meadowbrook Park.

2. **Don’t use the word “thing” (any form).**

No: Something lurked around the corner.

Yes: A shadow lurked around the corner.

3. **Don’t use the word “stuff” (except as a verb).**

No: He loaded all his stuff onto the back of his car.

Yes: He loaded all his gear (belongings, materials, etc.) onto the back of his car.

4. **Don’t use the word “fun” (or any subjective emotional evaluation).**

No: The people at the amusement park had a lot of fun.

Yes: People screamed from the roller coaster as it dived down a steep hill.

5. **there, their, they're**

I want to go over there.
Let's go to their house for dinner.

6. **your, you're**

Don't forget your books.

7. **its, it's**

The earth lost its atmosphere after the intense explosion.

8. **then, than**

I went here, and then I went there.
Ice cream tastes better than dirt.

9. **too, to, two**

Can I come, too?
You showed up too late to get one.
He went to the park.
Two dogs ran towards me.

10. **Don't use the words "a lot."**

No: You have a lot of trash.
Yes: You could fill a dump truck with all that trash.

11. **and (always spell it out)**

12. **yourself (or any word ending in self makes just one word)**

13. **well, ...** (Be certain of the style and audience for which you intend to write before using this informal approach.) Example: "Well, let me think about it for a while."

14. **all of a sudden... (Note: this phrase is a cliché.)**

15. **know, no, now**

"I know you; you sold me my parakeet," he said.
"No, I'm afraid you must be mistaken," she replied.

16. **Avoid using cheesy sound effects** (e.g., Boom! Ring! Kablam!)

17. **each other** (always two separate words)

18. **She replied, "Get out of here!"** (Don't forget the comma before the quote.)

19. **I could have died.** (not: I could of died.)

20. **Don't use fragments.**

No: Even though the man lived for 102 years.
Yes: Even though the man lived for 102 years, he never left California.

21. **Don't use comma splices.**
No: You like ice cream, I like it, too.
Yes: You like ice cream. I like it, too.
22. **Don't use run-ons.**
No: You like ice cream and I like it, too.
Yes: You like ice cream, and I like it, too.
23. **Use correct spelling**—poor spelling makes a reader think you probably have poor ideas, too.
24. **Watch out for missing words.**
No: Today I will find a job I can.
Yes: Today I will find a job if I can.
25. **Do not name any emotions.** (Instead, describe the behaviors to prove the emotions.)
No: The old man felt angry.
Yes: The man's wrinkled face grew scarlet as his fists clenched together tightly.
26. **Always follow "this" with a noun.**
No: When do you want this turned in?
Yes: When do you want this article turned in?
27. **Watch for agreement errors.**
No: Everyone has their own way of doing homework.
Yes: Everyone has his own way of doing homework.
28. **Underline (or italicize) titles of books—*Gone with the Wind*—and quote titles of short stories—"The Most Dangerous Game."**
29. **Add a hyphen between linked adjectives.**
No: I mistook the long haired boy for a scary looking girl.
Yes: I mistook the long-haired boy for a scary-looking girl.
30. **Stay consistent with the tense of your verbs.**
No: Peter mows the lawn whenever his mom went to the store,
Yes: Peter mows the lawn whenever his mom goes to the store.
31. **Don't write "I think" or "I believe" in your paper.** The reader already knows the paper reveals your opinion, and it sounds weak, as if you wouldn't mind if the reader didn't agree with you.
32. **Spell out any number fewer than 10,** such as "Five police cars surrounded the scene."
33. **Always put the quotation marks outside of the period at the end of a sentence:**
No: From now on, I will always avoid writing the word "is".
Yes: From now on, I will always avoid writing the word "is."
34. **Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.** (You end up sounding unoriginal and unsophisticated.)
-Taken from the Amazing Mr. Hansen, Tehachapi High

USEFUL TEMPLATES: INTRODUCING IDEAS, SENTENCE VARIETY, AND TRANSITIONS

Need help getting started on a paper and/or making certain rhetorical moves in your paper? These templates might help!

INTRODUCING WHAT “THEY SAY”

- A number of sociologists have recently suggested that X’s work has several fundamental problems.
- It has become common today to dismiss X’s contribution to this field of sociology.
- In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of Dr. X for _____.

INTRODUCING “STANDARD VIEWS”

- Americans today tend to believe that _____.
- Conventional wisdom has it that _____.
- Common sense seems to dictate that _____.
- The standard way of thinking about topic X has it that _____.
- It is often said that _____.
- My whole life I have heard it said that _____.
- You would think that _____.
- Many people assumed that _____.

MAKING WHAT “THEY SAY” SOMETHING YOU SAY

- I’ve always believed that _____.
- When I was a child, I used to think that _____.
- Although I should know better by now, I cannot help thinking that _____.
- At the same time that I believe _____, I also believe _____.

INTRODUCING SOMETHING IMPLIED OR ASSUMED

- Although none of them have ever said it so directly, my teachers have often given me the impression that _____.
- One implication of X’s treatment of _____ is that _____.
- Although X does not say so directly, she apparently assumes that _____.
- While they rarely admit as much, _____ often take for granted that _____.

INTRODUCING AN ONGOING DEBATE

- In discussions of X, one controversial issue has been _____. On one hand, _____ argues _____. On the other hand, _____ contends _____. Others even maintain _____. My own view is _____.
- When it comes to the topic of _____, most of us will readily agree that _____. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of _____. Whereas some are convinced that _____, others maintain that _____.

- In conclusion then, as I suggested earlier, defenders of _____ can't have it both ways. Their assertion that _____ is contradicted by their claim that _____.

CAPTURING AUTHORIAL ACTION

- X acknowledges that _____.
- X agrees that _____.
- X argues that _____.
- X believes that _____.
- X denies/does not deny that _____.
- X complains that _____.
- X concedes that _____.
- X demonstrates that _____.
- X deplors the tendency to _____.
- X celebrates the fact that _____.
- X emphasizes that _____.
- X insists that _____.
- X observes that _____.
- X questions whether _____.
- X refutes the claim that _____.
- X reminds us that _____.
- X reports that _____.
- X suggests that _____.
- X urges us to _____.

INTRODUCING QUOTATIONS

- X states, " _____."
- As the prominent philosopher X puts it, " _____."
- According to X, " _____."
- X himself writes, " _____."
- In her book, _____, X maintains that " _____."
- Writing the journal *Commentary*, X complains that, " _____."
- In X's view, " _____."
- X agrees when she writes, " _____."
- X disagrees when he writes, " _____."
- X complicates matters further when he writes, " _____."

EXPLAINING QUOTATIONS

- Basically, X is saying _____.
- In other words, X believes _____.
- In making this comment, X argues that _____.
- X is insisting that _____.
- X's point is that _____.
- The essence of X's argument is that _____.

DISAGREEING, WITH REASONS

- I think X is mistaken because she overlooks _____.
- X's claim that _____ rests upon the questionable assumption that _____.
- I disagree with X's view that _____ because, as recent research has shown, _____.
- X contradicts herself/can't have it both ways. On the one hand, she argues _____. But on the other hand, she also says _____.
- By focusing on _____, X overlooks the deeper problem of _____.
- X claims _____, but we don't need him to tell us that. Anyone familiar with _____ has long known that _____.

AGREEING—WITH A DIFFERENCE

- I agree that _____ because my experience _____ confirms it.
- X is surely right about _____ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that _____.
- X's theory of _____ is extremely useful because it sheds insight on the difficult problem of _____.
- I agree that _____, a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe _____.
- Those unfamiliar with this school of thought may be interested to know that it basically boils down to _____.
- If group X is right that _____, as I think they are, then we need to reassess the popular assumption that _____.

EMBEDDING VOICE MARKERS

- X overlooks what I consider an important point about _____.
- My own view is that what X insists is a _____ is in fact a _____.
- I wholeheartedly endorse what X calls _____.
- These conclusions, which X discusses in _____, add weight to the argument that _____.

AGREEING AND DISAGREEING SIMULTANEOUSLY

- Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that _____.

- Although I disagree with much that X says, I fully endorse his final conclusion that _____.
- Though I concede _____, I still insist that _____.
- Whereas X provides ample evidence that _____, Y and Z's research on _____ and _____ convinces me that _____ instead.
- X is right that _____, but she seems on more dubious ground when she claims that _____.
- While X is probably wrong when she claims that _____, she is right that _____.
- I'm of two minds about X's claim that _____. On the one hand, I agree that _____. On the other hand, I'm not sure if _____.
- My feelings on the issue are mixed. I do support X's position that _____, but I find Y's argument about _____ and Z's research on _____ to be equally persuasive.

SIGNAL WHO IS SAYING WHAT

- X argues _____.
- According to both X and Y, _____.
- Politicians _____, X argues, should _____.
- Most athletes will tell you that _____.
- My own view, however, is that _____.
- I agree, as X may not realize, that _____.
- But _____ are real, and arguably, the most significant factor in _____.
- But X is wrong that _____.
- However, it is simply not true that _____.
- Indeed, it is highly likely that _____.
- But the view that _____ does not fit all the facts.
- X is right that _____.
- X is wrong that _____.
- X is both right and wrong that _____.
- Yet a sober analysis of the matter reveals _____.
- Nevertheless, new research shows _____.
- Anyone familiar with _____ should see that _____.

ENTERTAINING OBJECTIONS

- At this point I would like to raise some objections that have been inspired by the skeptic in me. She feels that I have been ignoring _____. "_____" she says to me, "_____."
- Yet some readers may challenge the view that _____. After all, many believe _____. Indeed, my own argument that _____ seems to ignore _____ and _____.
- Of course, many will probably disagree with this assertion that _____.

NAMING YOUR NAYSAYERS

- Here many *feminists* would probably object that _____.
- But *social Darwinists* would certainly take issue with the argument that _____.
- *Biologists*, of course, may want to dispute my claim that _____.
- Nevertheless, both *followers and critics of Malcolm X* will probably argue that _____.
- Although not all *Christians* think alike, some of them will probably dispute my claim that _____.
- *Non-native English speakers* are so diverse in their views that it's hard to generalize about them, but some are likely to object on the grounds that _____.

INTRODUCING OBJECTIONS INFORMALLY

- But is my proposal realistic? What are the chances of its actually being adopted?
- Yet is it always true that _____? Is it always the case, as I have been suggesting, that _____?
- However, does the evidence I've cited prove conclusively that _____?
- "Impossible," you say. "Your evidence must be skewed."

MAKING CONCESSIONS WHILE STILL STANDING YOUR GROUND

- Although I grant that _____, I still maintain that _____.
- Proponents of X are right to argue that _____. But they exaggerate when they claim that _____.
- While it is true that _____, it does not necessarily follow that _____.
- On the one hand, I agree with X that _____. But on the other hand, I still insist that _____.

INDICATING WHO CARES

- _____ used to think _____. But recently [or within the past few decades] _____ suggests that _____.
- What this new research does, then, is correct the mistaken impression, held by many earlier researchers, that _____.
- These findings challenge the work of earlier researchers, who tended to assume that _____.
- Recent studies like these shed new light on _____, which previous studies had not addressed.
- Researchers have long assumed that _____. For instance, one eminent scholar of cell biology, _____, assumed in _____, her seminal work on cell structures and functions that fat cells _____. As _____ herself put it, "_____" (200). Another leading scientist, _____, argued that fat cells "_____" (200). Ultimately, when it came to the nature of fat, the basic assumption was that _____.
- If sports enthusiasts stopped to think about it, many of them might simply assume that the most successful athletes _____. However, new research shows _____.
- These findings challenge dieter's common assumptions that _____.

- At first glance, teenagers appear to _____. But on closer inspection _____.

ESTABLISHING WHY YOUR CLAIM MATTERS

- X matters/is important because _____.
- Although X may seem trivial, it is in fact crucial in terms of today's concern over _____.
- Ultimately, what is at stake here is _____.
- These findings have important consequences for the broader domain of _____.
- My discussion of X is in fact addressing the larger matter of _____.
- These conclusions/This discovery will have significant applications in _____ as well as in _____.
- Although X may seem of concern to only a small group of _____, it should in fact concern anyone who cares about _____.

ADDING METACOMMENTARY

- In other words,
- What _____ really means by this is
- Essentially, I am arguing that
- My point is not that we should _____, but that we should _____.
- What _____ really means is _____.
- In other words, _____.
- To put it another way, _____.
- In sum, then, _____.
- My conclusion, then, is that, _____.
- In short, _____.
- What is more important, _____.
- Incidentally, _____.
- By the way, _____.
- Chapter 2 explores, _____, while Chapter 3 examines _____.
- Having just argued that _____, let us now turn our attention to _____.
- Although some readers may object that _____, I would answer that _____.

*Courtesy the Odegaard Writing & Research Center (<http://www.depts.washington.edu/owrc>) Adapted from Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter In Academic Writing*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.*

TRANSITIONS AND PARAGRAPH HOOKS

Time	Place	Idea	Extending elaboration by comparing	Extending elaboration by contrasting	Extending elaboration by emphasizing/clarifying	Extending elaboration by adding another example
After, afterward, at first, as before, finally, immediately, later, next, now, previously, soon, then	Above, ahead, among, beyond, down, elsewhere, farther, here, in front of, in the background, near, nearby, next to, there	First, second, third, similarly, as, in the same way, for instance, likewise, however	As, at the same time, by comparison, equally, in the same manner, likewise, similarly	Although, and yet, as, as though, at the same time, but, in contrast, conversely, even so, unlike, even though, however, in spite of, neither, nevertheless, on the one hand, on the other hand, provided that, though, unfortunately, whereas, yet	Especially, for instance, in fact, indeed, that is, in other words	Moreover, most important, now, so, additionally, again, also, especially, in addition, in fact, last, again, also, besides, equally, important, furthermore, similarly, in contrast

