

“What AP Readers Long to See”

A list compiled during the 1994 AP English Reading at Trinity University in San Antonio

1. Read the prompt. It hurts to give a low score to someone who misread the prompt but wrote a good essay.
2. Do everything the prompt asks. Most writers focus on a few strategies and never fully answer the question.
3. Think before you write. Which strategies are used and how do they answer the prompt?
4. Plan your response. It is not easy for the reader to pick over an essay attempting to decipher sentences. A little organization will help you avoid extensive editing.
5. Make a strong first impression. Build your opening response. Don't parrot the prompt word for word. The reader knows it from memory.
6. Begin your response immediately. Do not take a circuitous route with generalizations.
7. Be thorough and specific. Do not simply “point out” strategies. Explain how they are used, give examples, and show how they establish what the question is asking. No long quotes!
8. Use clear transitions that help the reader follow the ideas in your essays. Keep your paragraphs organized; do not digress.
9. Resist putting in a “canned” quotation or critic's comment if it does not fit. You will get a response from your reader but it will not be the one you want.
10. Write to express, not to impress. Keep vocabulary and syntax within your zone of competence. Students who inflate their writing often inadvertently entertain, but seldom explain.
11. Demonstrate that you understand style. Show the reader how the author has developed the selection to create the desired effect. This indicates that you understand the intricacies of the creative process.
12. Maintain an economy of language, saying much with few words. The best student writers see much, but say it quite succinctly. Often ideas are embedded rather than listed.
13. Let your writing dance with ideas and insights. You can receive a 6 or a 7 with a lockstep approach, but the essays that earn 8's and 9's expand to a wider perspective.
14. Write legibly. If a reader cannot read half the words, you will not get a fair reading—even if your essay is passed on to a reader with keener eyesight.
15. Let your work stand on its own merits. Avoid penning “pity me” notes to the reader (“I was up all night.” “I have a cold,” etc.).