

CHAPTER

5

The Prose Passage Essay

IN THIS CHAPTER

Summary: Complete explanation of the prose passage essay and its purpose as it is presented on the AP English Literature exam

KEY IDEA

Key Ideas

- ✦ Learn the types of prose passage prompts you might encounter on the AP English Literature exam
- ✦ Learn about the rubrics and rating of the AP English Literature prose passage essay
- ✦ Learn the basics of reading and notating a given passage
- ✦ Learn the basics of constructing your response to the prompt
- ✦ Examine student models that respond to the diagnostic exam's prose passage essay prompt
- ✦ Learn how the rubrics were used to rate the student sample essays

Introduction to the Prose Passage Essay

This section of the exam gives you an opportunity to read and analyze a prose piece of literature. This is your chance to become personally involved in the text and to demonstrate your literary skills.

What is an AP Literature prose passage?

Generally, it is a one-page excerpt from a work of fiction or nonfiction. More often than not, the selection will be from a novel or short story. The nonfiction selection may include essays, biographies, autobiographies, and articles from periodicals. Be aware that the exam may also present an excerpt from a drama.

What is the purpose in writing an essay about a prose piece?

First, the people at the College Board want to determine your facility in reading and interpreting a sustained piece of literature. It requires you to understand the text and to analyze those techniques and devices the author uses to achieve his or her purpose.

Second, the AP exam is designed to allow you to demonstrate your ease and fluency with terminology, interpretation, and criticism. Also, the level of your writing should be a direct reflection of your critical thinking.

Third, the AP exam determines your ability to make connections between analysis and interpretation. For example, when you find a metaphor, you should identify and connect it to the author's intended purpose or meaning. You should not just list items as you locate them. You must connect them to your interpretation.



Before beginning to work with an actual prose passage, read the review of processes and terms in the Comprehensive Review section of this book. You should also have completed some of the activities in that section.

Types of Prose Passage Essay Questions

Let's look at a few prose passage questions that have been asked on the AP Literature exam in the past:



- Analyze narrative and literary techniques and other resources of language used for characterization.
- How does a narrator reveal character? (i.e., tone, diction, syntax, point of view)
- How does the author reveal a character's predicament? (i.e., diction, imagery, point of view)
- Explain the effect of the passage on the reader.
- Compare/contrast two passages concerning diction and details for effect on reader.
- How does the passage provide characterization and evaluation of one character over another? (i.e., diction, syntax, imagery, tone)
- What is the attitude of the speaker toward a particular subject?
- Analyze the effect of revision when given both the original and the revised version of a text.
- Analyze style and tone and how they are used to explore the author's attitudes toward his or her subject.
- How is the reader prepared for the conclusion of the piece?

You should be prepared to write an essay based on any of these prompts. Practice. Practice. Practice. Practice anticipating questions. Keep a running list of the kinds of questions your teacher asks.



Don't be thrown by the complexity of a passage. Remember, *you* choose the references you wish to incorporate into your essay. So, even if you haven't understood everything, you are still able to write an intelligent essay—as long as you address the prompt and refer to the parts of the passage you do understand.

Watch out for overconfidence when you see what you believe to be an easy question with an easy passage. You are going to have to work extra hard to find the nuances in the text that will allow you to write a mature essay.

Rating the Prose Passage Essay

You will be relieved to know that the rating of your essay is *not* based on whether or not the reader likes you or agrees with your point-of-view.

How do the test readers evaluate my essay?

It's important to understand just what it is that goes into rating your essay. This is called a *rubric*, but don't let that word frighten you. A rubric is a word that simply refers to the rating standards that are set and used by the people who read the essays. These standards are fairly consistent, no matter what the prompt might be. The primary change is in the citing of the specifics in a particular prompt.

Let us assure you that, as experienced readers of the AP English exams, we know that the readers are trained to reward those things you do well in addressing the question. They are *not* looking to punish you. They are aware of the time constraints, and they read your essay just as your own instructor would read the first draft of an essay you wrote on a 40-minute exam. These readers look forward to an interesting, insightful, and well-constructed essay.

So, let's take a look at the following rubrics:

- A 9 essay has all the qualities of an 8 essay, *and* the writing style is especially impressive, as is the analysis and/or discussion of the specifics related to the prompt and the text.
- An 8 essay will effectively and cohesively address the prompt. It will analyze and/or discuss the stylistic elements called for in the question. And it will do so using appropriate evidence from the given text. The essay will also show the writer's ability to control language well.
- A 7 essay has all the properties of a 6, only with a more complete and well-developed analysis/discussion or a more mature writing style.
- A 6 essay adequately addresses the prompt. The analysis and/or discussion is on target and makes use of appropriate specifics from the text. However, these elements are less fully developed than scores in the 7, 8, and 9 range. The essay writer's ideas are expressed with clarity, but the writing may have a few errors in syntax and/or diction.
- A 5 essay demonstrates that the writer understands the prompt. The analysis/discussion is generally understandable, but the analysis/discussion is limited or uneven. The writer's ideas are expressed clearly with a few errors in syntax or diction.
- A 4 essay is not an adequate response to the prompt. The writer's analysis/discussion of the text indicates a misunderstanding, an oversimplification, or a misrepresentation of the given passage. The writer may use evidence that is not appropriate or not sufficient to support the analysis/discussion.
- A 3 essay is a lower 4 because it is even less effective in addressing the prompt. It is also less mature in its syntax and organization.
- A 2 essay indicates little success in speaking to the prompt. The writer may misread the question, only summarize the passage, never develop the required analysis/discussion, or simply ignore the prompt and write about another topic altogether. The writing may also lack organization and control of language and syntax. (*Note:* No matter how good a summary may be, it will never rate more than a 2.)
- A 1 essay is a lower 2 because it is even more simplistic, disorganized, and lacking in control of language.





Remember, the essay is really a first draft. The test readers know this and approach each essay with this in mind.

Timing the Essay

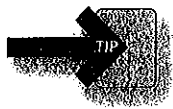


Timing is crucial. With that in mind, here's a workable strategy:

- 1–3 minutes reading and “working the prompt.”
- 5 minutes reading and making marginal notes about the passage. Try to isolate 2 quotations that strike you. This may give you your opening and closing.
- 10 minutes preparing to write. (Choose one or two of the following methods that you feel comfortable with.)
 - Underlining, bracketing, circling
 - Marginal notations
 - Charts or key word/one word/line number outlining
- 20 minutes to write your essay, based on your preparation.
- 3 minutes for proofreading.

Note: Throughout this book the term **highlight** will also refer to underlining, circling, or bracketing.

Using a highlighter is not allowed during the exam. However, it is a strong tool for practice in critical reading.



In the margin, note what time you should be finished with each essay. For example, the test starts at 1 P.M. You write 1:40 in the margin. Time to move on.

Working the Prompt

You can't write clearly unless you know *Why* you are writing and *What's Expected* of you. When you “Work the Prompt,” you are maximizing both of these areas.

How should I go about reading the prose prompt?

To bring the answer home to you, we will deconstruct a prompt for you now. (This is the same question that is in the Diagnostic/Master exam.) Plan to spend 1–3 minutes carefully reading the question. This will give you time to really digest what the question is asking you to do.

Here's the prompt:

In the following passage from the short story “The Dead,” James Joyce presents an insight into the character of Gabriel. Write a well-organized essay in which you discuss various aspects of Gabriel's character that Joyce reveals to the reader and to Gabriel himself. Refer to such techniques and devices as imagery, point of view, motif, diction, and syntax.

Here are three reasons why you should do a 1–3 minute careful analysis of the prompt.

1. Once you know what is expected, you will read in a more directed manner.
2. Once you internalize the question, you will be sensitive to those details that will apply.
3. Once you know all the facets that need to be addressed, you will be able to write a complete essay demonstrating adherence to the topic.



TIP

Topic adherence, which means sticking to the question, is key to achieving a high score.

Do this now. Underline, circle, or bracket the essential terms and elements in the prompt. Time yourself. How long did it take you? _____. Don't worry if it took you longer than 1–3 minutes in this first attempt. You will be practicing this technique throughout this review, and it will become almost second nature to you.

Compare our working of the prompt with yours.

In the following passage from the short story “The Dead,” James Joyce presents an insight into the character of Gabriel. Write a well-organized essay in which you discuss various aspects of Gabriel’s character that Joyce reveals to the reader and to Gabriel himself. Refer to such techniques and devices as imagery, point of view, motif, diction, and syntax.

In this prompt, anything else you may have highlighted is extraneous.

TIP

When the question uses the expression “such as,” you are *not* required to use only those ideas presented; you are free to use your own selection of techniques and devices. Notice that the prompt requires more than one technique. One will not be enough. You *must* use more than one. If you fail to use more than one technique, no matter how well you present your answer, your essay will be incomplete.

Reading and Notating the Prose Passage

Depending on your style and comfort level, choose one of these approaches to your reading:

STRATEGY

1. A. Read quickly to get the gist of the passage.
B. Reread, using the visual and marginal notes approach.
2. A. Read slowly, using highlighting and making marginal notes.
B. Reread to confirm that you understand the full impact of the passage.

Note: In both approaches, you *must* highlight and make marginal notes. There is no way to avoid this. Ignore what you don't immediately understand. It may become clear to you after you finish reading the passage. Practice. Practice. Concentrate on those parts of the passage that apply to what you highlighted in the prompt.

There are many ways to read and interpret any given passage. You have to choose which one to use and which specifics to include for support. Don't be rattled if there is leftover material.

We've reproduced the passage for you below so that you can practice both the reading and the process of deconstructing the text. Use highlighting, arrows, circles, underlining, notes, numbers, and whatever you need to make the connections clear to you.

Do this now. Spend between 8–10 minutes working the material. *Do not skip this step.* It is time well spent and is a key to the high-score essay.

The Dead

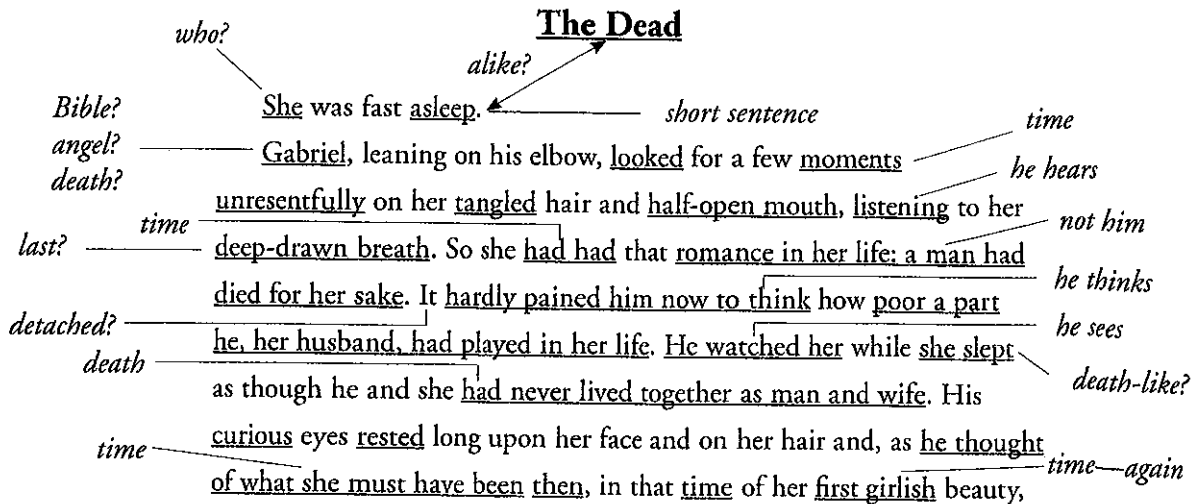
She was fast asleep.

Gabriel, leaning on his elbow, looked for a few moments unresentfully on her tangled hair and half-open mouth, listening to her deep-drawn breath. So she had had that romance in her life: a man had died for her sake. It hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life. He watched her while she slept as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife. His curious eyes rested long upon her face and on her hair and, as he thought of what she must have been then, in that time of her first girlish beauty, a strange friendly pity for her entered his soul. He did not like to say even to himself that her face was no longer beautiful but he knew that it was no longer the face for which Michael Furey had braved death. 5
10

Perhaps she had not told him all the story. His eyes moved to the chair over which she had thrown some of her clothes. A petticoat string dangled to the floor. One boot stood upright, its limp upper fallen down: the fellow of it lay upon the side. He wondered at his riot of emotions of an hour before. From what had it proceeded? From his aunt's supper, from his own foolish speech, from the wine and dancing, the merry-making when saying good-night in the hall, the pleasure of the walk along the river in the snow. Poor Aunt Julia! She, too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. He had caught that haggard look upon her face for a moment when she was singing *Arrayed for the Bridal*. Soon, perhaps, he would be sitting in the same drawing-room dressed in black, his silk hat on his knees. The blinds would be drawn down and Aunt Kate would be sitting beside him, crying and blowing her nose and telling him how Julia had died. He would cast about in his mind for some words that might console her, and would find only lame and useless ones. Yes, yes: that would happen very soon. 15
20
25



Now, compare your reading notes with what we've done below. Yours may vary from ours, but the results of your note-taking should be similar in scope.



he's kind? a strange friendly pity for her entered his soul. *back to death*
weak even to himself that her face was no longer beautiful but he knew that it *time*
coward? was no longer the face for which Michael Furey had braved death. *fury?*
self-image *time* Perhaps she had not told him all the story. His eyes moved to the *not a*
time chair over which she had thrown some of her clothes. A petticoat string *coward*
 dangled to the floor. One boot stood upright, its limp upper fallen down: *weak?*
time the fellow of it lay upon the side. He wondered at his riot of emotions of *lack of*
self-image an hour before. From what had it proceeded? From his aunt's supper, *control?*
death? from his own foolish speech, from the wine and dancing, the merry-making *afraid to*
cold death? when saying good-night in the hall, the pleasure of the walk along the river *let go?*
ghost? in the snow. Poor Aunt Julia! She, too, would soon be a shade with the *time*
cold shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. He had caught that haggard look *cold*
time upon her face for a moment when she was singing *Arrayed for the Bridal*.
time *Soon*, perhaps, he would be sitting in the same drawing-room dressed in *mourning*
death black, his silk hat on his knees. The blinds would be drawn down and *closed off*
death Aunt Kate would be sitting beside him, crying and blowing her nose and *mourning*
weak? telling him how Julia had died. He would cast about in his mind for some *self-image*
uncertain? words that might console her, and would find only lame and useless ones. *detached*
 Yes, yes: that would happen very soon. *time* *weakness*



After you have marked the passage, review the prompt. You are asked to look for ways Joyce reveals Gabriel's character. When you consult your notes, certain categories will begin to pop out at you. These can be the basis for the development of the body of your essay. For example, we saw details and images that support the concepts of:

- Death
- Time
- Insecurity
- Passivity
- Detachment

In addition, stylistically, we noticed the use of short sentences.

Here's how one category developed using the notations made on the passage. Notice that we have ignored notes that did not apply to the prompt.

Concept: Time

Words/Phrases from the Text:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| "a few moments" | "no longer the face" |
| "had had that romance" | "an hour before" |
| "he thought of what she must have been then" | "soon be a shade" |
| "girlish beauty" | "for a moment" |
| "no longer beautiful" | "soon" |
| | "that would happen very soon" |

Conclusion: Gabriel moves from the distant past to the near future. He becomes aware of the change in the marital relationship with his wife and with his own passage.

Your Turn

Now you choose a concept you are able to explore and defend that reveals Gabriel's character.

Concept:

Words/Phrases from the Text:

Conclusion:

In response to the prompt, we have decided that the techniques/devices we will analyze are:

- Imagery
- Diction
- Style
- Motif

Here's one technique/device and how it is developed in the passage. Again, notice that we use our margin notes to trace this development.

Technique/Device: Imagery

Words/Phrases from the Text:

the title "The Dead"	Gabriel's very name
"entered his soul"	"braved death"
"fallen down"	"good night"
"in the snow"	"would soon be a shade"
"dressed in black"	"the blinds would be drawn"
"crying and blowing her nose"	

Conclusion: These images foreshadow and emphasize that there is a coldness and a loss in relationships and self-image.

Your Turn

Now you choose the technique/device you are able to explore and defend that reveals Gabriel's character.

Technique/Device:

Words/Phrases from the Text:

Conclusion:



If you expand the above techniques/devices and categories into interpretive statements and support those statements with appropriate details that you've already isolated, you will be writing a detailed essay.

Writing the Opening Paragraph

Your opening statement is the one that sets the tone of your essay and possibly raises the expectations of the reader. Spend time on your first paragraph to maximize your score.

Make certain that your topic is very clear. This reinforces the idea that you fully understand what is expected of you and what you will communicate to the reader. Generally, identify both the text and its author in this first paragraph.

A suggested approach is to relate a direct quotation from the passage to the topic.



Consider the "philosophy of firsts." It is a crucial strategy to spend focused time on the first part of the question and on the first paragraph of the essay because:

1. It establishes the direction and tone of your essay.
2. It gives you the guidelines for what to develop in your essay.
3. It connects you to the reader.

Remember our philosophy: **In the Beginning:** if you focus on the beginning, the rest will fall into place. A wonderful thing happens after much practice, highlighting, and note-taking. Your mind starts to focus automatically. Trust us on this. It is the winning edge that can take an average essay and raise it to a higher level.

Do this now. Take 5 minutes to write your opening paragraph for "The Dead" prompt. Write quickly, referring to your notes.

Let's check what you've written:

- Have you included author and title? _____ Yes _____ No
- Have you addressed the character of Gabriel? _____ Yes _____ No

Highlight these points to see if you've done them. You may be surprised at what is actually there.

- Have you specifically mentioned the techniques you will refer to in your essay?

_____ Yes _____ No

Here are four sample opening paragraphs that address all of the criteria:

A

In “The Dead” by James Joyce, the character Gabriel is revealed through diction, point of view, and imagery as he watches his wife sleep.

B

Poor Gabriel! Who would have thought he knew so little about himself and his life. And yet, in “The Dead,” James Joyce, through diction, point of view, and imagery, makes it clear to the reader and to Gabriel that there is much to reveal about his character.

C

“Yes, yes: that would happen very soon.” And, yes, very soon the reader of the excerpt from Joyce’s “The Dead” gets to know the character of Gabriel. Through diction, point of view, and imagery, we are introduced to Gabriel and what he thinks of himself.

D

“The Dead.” How apt a title. James Joyce turns his reader into a fly on the wall as Gabriel is about to realize the many losses in his life. Death pervades the passage, from his sleeping wife to his dying aunt.

Each of these opening paragraphs is an acceptable beginning to an AP Literature exam essay. Note what each of these paragraphs accomplishes:

- Each has identified the title and author.
- Each has stated which techniques/devices will be used.
- Each has stated the purpose of analyzing these techniques/devices.

Now, note what is different about each opening paragraph:

- Sample **A** restates the question without anything extra. It is to the point, so much so that it does nothing more than repeat the question. It’s correct, but it does not really pique the reader’s interest. (Use this type of opening if you feel unsure of or uncomfortable with the prompt.)
- Sample **B** reveals the writer’s attitude toward the subject. The writer has already determined that Gabriel is flawed and indicates an understanding of how Gabriel’s character is revealed in the passage.
- Sample **C**, with its direct quotation, places the reader immediately into the passage. The reader quickly begins to hear the writer’s voice through his or her choice of words (diction).
- Sample **D**, at first glance, reveals a mature, confident writer who is not afraid to *imply* the prompt’s criteria.

Note: There are many other types of opening paragraphs that could do the job as well. The paragraphs above are just a few samples.

Into which of the above samples would you classify your opening paragraph?




Writing the Body

When you write the body of your essay, take only 15–20 minutes. Time yourself and try your best to finish within that time frame.

Since this is practice, don't panic if you can't complete the essay within the allotted time. You will become more and more comfortable with the tasks presented to you as you gain experience with this type of question.

What should I include in the body of the prose passage essay?

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1. Obviously, this is where you present your interpretation and the points you wish to make that are related to the prompt.
 2. Use specific references and details from the passage.
 - Don't always paraphrase the original; refer directly to it.
 - Place quotation marks around those words and phrases that you extract from the passage.
 3. Use "connective tissue" in your essay to establish adherence to the question.
 - Use the repetition of key ideas from your opening paragraph.
 - Try using "echo words" (i.e., synonyms, such as death/loss/passing or character/persona/personality).
 - Create transitions from one paragraph to the next.

To understand the process, carefully read the following sample paragraphs. Each develops one of the categories and techniques/devices asked for in the prompt. Notice the specific references and the "connective tissue." Also, notice that details that do not apply to the prompt have been ignored.

A

This paragraph develops **imagery**.

Joyce creates imagery to lead his reader to sense the cloud of death that pervades Gabriel's world. From its very title "The Dead," the reader is prepared for loss. Just what has Gabriel lost: his wife, his confidence, his job, a friend, a relative, what? As his "wife slept," Gabriel sees her "half-open mouth" and "listens" to her "deep-drawn breath." The reader almost senses this to be a death watch. The images about the room reinforce this sense of doom. One boot is "limp" and the other is "fallen down." Picturing the future, Gabriel sees a "drawing-room dressed in black" with blinds "drawn down" and his Aunt Kate "crying" and "telling him how Julia had died." And to underscore his own feelings of internal lifelessness, he can only find "lame and useless" words of comfort.

B

This paragraph develops the **motif of time**.

Time is a constant from the beginning to the end of the passage. In the first paragraph, Gabriel is in the present while thinking of the past. He is an observer, watching his wife as he, himself, is observed by the narrator, and as we, as readers, observe the entire scene. Time moves the reader and Gabriel through the experience. Immediately, we spend a "few moments" with Gabriel as he goes back and forth in time assessing his relationship with his wife. He recognizes she "had had romance in the past." But, "it hardly pains him now." He thinks of what she had been "then" in her "girlish" beauty, which may indicate his own aging. His "strange, friendly pity," because she is "no longer

beautiful,” may be self-pity, as well. In the next paragraph, we are with Gabriel as he reflects on his emotional “riot” only an hour before. However, he jumps to the future because he can’t sustain self-examination. He chooses to allow himself to jump to this future and a new subject—Aunt Julia’s death. In this future, he continues to see only his inability and incompetence. For Gabriel, all this will happen “very soon.”

C

This passage develops **diction**.

Gabriel appears to be a man who is on the outside of his life. Joyce’s diction reveals his passive nature. Gabriel “looked on” and “watched” his wife sleeping. He spent time “listening to her breath” and was “hardly pained by his role in her life.” His eyes “rest” on her, and he “thinks of the past.” All of Gabriel’s actions are as weak as a “limp” and “fallen down” boot, “inert in the face of life.” He is in direct contrast to Michael Furey, who has “braved death.” And he knows this about himself. The narrator’s diction reveals that Gabriel “did not like to say even to himself,” implying that he is too weak to face the truth.

Later in the text, Gabriel’s word choice further indicates his insecurity. He is troubled by his “riot of emotions,” his “foolish speech.” It is obvious that Gabriel will not take such risks again.

D

This passage develops **style**.

Joyce’s very straightforward writing style supports the conclusions he wishes the reader to draw about the character of Gabriel. Most sentences are in the subject/verb, simple sentence form, reflecting the plain, uncomplicated character of Gabriel.

Joyce employs a third person narrator to further reinforce Gabriel’s detachment from his own circumstances. We watch him observing his own life with little or no connection on his part. He wonders at his “riot of emotions.” All this is presented without Joyce using obvious poetic devices. This punctuates the lack of “romance” in Gabriel’s life when compared with that of Michael Furey.



Start a study group. Approach an essay as a team. After you’ve deconstructed the prompt, have each person write a paragraph on a separate area of the question. Then come together and discuss what was written. You’ll be amazed at how much fun this is because the work will carry you away. This is a chance to explore exciting ideas.

Again, sharing your writing with members of your class or study group will allow you to gain experience and find a comfort zone with requirements and possibilities.

We urge you to spend more time developing the body paragraphs than worrying about a concluding paragraph, especially one that begins with “In conclusion,” or “In summary.” In such a brief essay, the reader will have no problem remembering what you have already stated. It is not necessary to repeat yourself in a summary-type final paragraph.

If you want to make a final statement, try to link your ideas to a particularly effective line or image from the passage.

Note: Look at the last line of Sample **B** on motif. For Gabriel, all this will happen “very soon.” This final sentence would be fine as the conclusion to the essay. A conclusion does not have to be a paragraph. It can be the writer’s final remark or observation presented in a sentence or two.

Do this now. Write the body of your essay. Time yourself. Allow 15–20 minutes to complete this task.

Sample Student Essays

Following are two actual student essays followed by a rubric and comments on each. Read both of the samples in sequence to clarify the differences between “high” and “mid-range” essays.

Student Essay A

A picture is worth a thousand words, but James Joyce manages to paint a pretty vivid one in only two short paragraphs. Joyce offers tremendous insight into the character of Gabriel in the short story “The Dead.” He captures the essence of a scene laden with death and laced with tones of despair and hopelessness. By employing third person narration alternating with a stream of consciousness, Joyce demonstrates his abilities to delve deep into Gabriel’s mind, illustrating this somewhat detached disposition and low self-image. 5

The passage takes us through Gabriel’s reflections upon past, present, and future events while his inner character unfolds. Joyce’s careful use of diction suggests that Gabriel has emotionally closed himself off to the world as he tries to cope with some aforementioned incident. He was “hardly pained” to think about a situation which caused a “riot of emotions” just a little earlier on that evening. Here, Joyce is emphasizing Gabriel’s way of coping with an unfavorable event by blocking it out. He continues to “unresentfully” reflect upon what had occurred, closing himself off from any pain he obviously experienced a short while ago. 10

With the powerful omniscience of a third-person narrator, Joyce is able to describe the workings of Gabriel’s inner consciousness without writing from the first-person point of view. Gabriel further detaches himself as he thinks about his wife. He watches her from the point of view of an outsider, as if they were never married. The mere fact that Gabriel is able to do this suggests that he and his wife do not have a truly loving relationship. This assertion is underscored by the “friendly” pity Gabriel feels for his wife, emphasizing the lack of true love in their relationship. Gabriel later questions his wife’s honesty, further emphasizing a troubled relationship. The reader may be inclined to infer that Gabriel is completely devoid of compassion; however, this idea is refuted. Gabriel proceeds to express an element of sorrow when he thinks back to his wife’s youth and beauty. 15

The evening’s events had evidently triggered some type of emotional outburst which Gabriel cannot stop thinking about. His mental state is paralleled by the chaotic state of disorder in the room he is in. With a masterful control of language and syntax, Joyce describes in short, choppy sentences the array of clothing strewn around the room. This is followed by one of the longest sentences in the passage. Joyce reveals this series of events all at once, paralleling Gabriel’s release of a multitude of emotions at once. 20

Joyce weaves a motif of darkness and death into the story. His aunt’s “haggard” appearance ironically catches Gabriel’s attention during the recitation of Arrayed for the Bridal, a seemingly happy song. This image of happiness and 25

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marriage is further contrasted with images of the woman's funeral and a detailed description of how Gabriel will mourn for her. Joyce also takes time to underscore Gabriel's low self-esteem, in that he will only think of "lame and useless" words at a time when comforting tones are necessary. He is essentially describing himself, since it has been established that he failed as a husband and that he is emotionally distraught even though he blocks out the pain he feels. "The blinds would be drawn down," Gabriel says, as he describes both the room at his aunt's funeral and his mental state of affairs.

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The true originator of "stream-of-consciousness" techniques, Joyce delves deep into Gabriel's mind, describing his wide range of emotions and state of mind. His powerful diction reveals a great deal about Gabriel's character while his implied insights penetrate into the reader's mind, reinforcing the abstract meanings behind the actions and events that transpire throughout the course of his story.

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Student Essay B

In the excerpt from the short story "The Dead" from *Dubliners* by James Joyce, the author describes some personality traits of the character Gabriel as he sits watching a sleeping woman. The point of view from which this excerpt is expressed helps the reader to get to know Gabriel because the narrator is omniscient and knows how Gabriel perceives things and what he is thinking. With the use of many literary devices such as imagery, diction, and syntax, the reader is able to see that Gabriel is an observant and a reflective person, but he is also detached.

5

Gabriel comes across as observant, because throughout the entire passage he is observing a woman, his wife, sleeping. He scans the room looking over everything and taking note of everything. An example of this is looking at "her tangled hair and half-open mouth, listening to her deep drawn breath." The author uses the technique of syntax ("deep-drawn breath" and "half-open mouth") in the above quotation to show us exactly what Gabriel is seeing. Gabriel notices many details, and they are described so that the reader can clearly formulate a picture of what he is gazing at. This imagery can be seen in lines such as the one where the woman's boots are being described. "One boot stood upright, its limp upper fallen down; the fellow of it lay upon the side." The diction used such as "limp" and "upright," are concrete words that create clear pictures. Another reason that Gabriel comes across as observant is because he catches and notices little things. For example, he "caught" the "haggard look" on his Aunt Julia's face.

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Resulting from the fact that Gabriel is observant, he is also reflective. He thinks over past events that had happened and wonders what caused them and why he did what he did. In the first paragraph he reflects on his wife's "fading beauty," what she used to look like, and the story of the death of Michael Furey. He realizes that it is a possibility that she had not told him the entire story concerning the boy's death. He further reflects when he is thinking about his emotional outburst. He asks himself many questions including "From what had it preceded?"

25

A feeling of detachment is also present. The way he looks at his wife "as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife" shows that he is viewing his own life from an objective standpoint. He is able to look at his own life as though it wasn't his. The sentence that reads "it hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life," further exemplifies this feeling of detachment. Feelings that he used to feel no longer even touched him. He was able to recognize them, yet remain separate. In the second paragraph Gabriel continues

30

to come across as remote. He is able to picture and describe in great detail the death and funeral of his Aunt Julia. He narrates the future drastic event in a matter-of-fact way. Gabriel goes so far as to describe what he will be thinking at the time of his Aunt Julia's death which is "he would cast about in his mind for some words that might console her (his Aunt Kate), and would find only lame and useless ones." This statement finalizes the idea that Gabriel is a person who is, at least to some degree, detached from his own life. 35

Even though the passage is fairly short, the author is able to impart a fair amount of information concerning the character Gabriel. It becomes apparent that he possesses the qualities of observance, reflection, and detachment. These qualities are all interconnected because of the fact that he is observant leading to his ability to reflect on his actions and actions of others. This in turn leads to his detachment, because when he reflects on his life he does it from the standpoint of a third-person narrator. The author's use of literary techniques helps to convey these personality traits of Gabriel to a reader. 40

Let's take a look at a set of rubrics for this prose passage essay. (If you want to see actual AP rubrics as used in a recent AP Lit exam, log on to the College Board website: <www.collegeboard.org/ap>.) As you probably know, essays are rated on a 9–1 scale, with 9 the highest and 1 the lowest. Since we are not with you to personally rate your essay and to respond to your style and approach, we will, instead, list the criteria for high-, middle-, and low-range papers. These criteria are based on our experience with rubrics and reading AP Literature exam essays. 45

A *high* range essay can be a 9 or an 8. *Middle* refers to essays in the 7, 6, 5 range. And the *low* scoring essays are rated 4, 3, 2, 1.

After reading the following rubrics, evaluate the two essays that you have just read.

Note: Let's be honest with each other. We all can recognize a 9 essay. It sings, and we wish we had written it. It's wonderful that the essays don't all have to sing the same song with the same words and rhythm. Conversely, we can, unfortunately, recognize the 1 or 2 paper which is off key, and we are relieved not to have written one like it.

Rating the Student Essays

High-Range Essay (9–8)

- Indicates complete understanding of the prompt.
- Distinguishes between what Gabriel acknowledges about himself and what the reader comes to know about him.
- Explores the complexity of Gabriel's character.
- Identifies and analyzes Joyce's literary techniques, such as imagery, diction, point of view, motif, and style.
- Cites specific references to the passage.
- Illustrates and supports the points being made.
- Is clear, well-organized, and coherent.
- Reflects the ability to manipulate language at an advanced level.
- Contains only minor errors or flaws, if any.



Note: Rarely, a 7 essay can make the jump into the high range because of its more mature style and perception.

Middle-Range Essay (7-6-5)

- Refers accurately to the prompt.
- Refers accurately to the literary devices used by Joyce.
- Provides a less thorough analysis of Gabriel's character than the higher-rated paper.
- Is less adept at linking techniques to the purpose of the passage.
- Demonstrates writing that is adequate to convey the writer's intent.
- May not be sensitive to the implications about Gabriel's character.

Note: The 7 paper demonstrates a more consistent command of college-level writing than does the 5 or 6 paper.

A 5 paper does the minimum required. It relies on generalizations and sketchy analysis. It is often sidetracked by plot, and the references may be limited or simplistic.

Low-Range Essay (4-3-2-1)

- Does not respond adequately to the prompt.
- Demonstrates insufficient and/or inaccurate understanding of the passage.
- Does not link literary devices to Gabriel's character.
- Underdevelops and/or inaccurately analyzes literary techniques.
- Fails to demonstrate an understanding of Gabriel's character.
- Demonstrates weak control of the elements of diction, syntax, and organization.

Note: A 4 or 3 essay may do no more than paraphrase sections of the passage rather than analyze Gabriel's character.

A 2 essay may merely summarize the passage. (*No matter how well written, a summary can never earn more than a 2.*)

A 1-2 essay indicates a major lack of understanding and control. It fails to comprehend the prompt and/or the passage. It may also indicate severe writing problems.

How would you rate these essays?

Now, compare your evaluation of the two student essays with ours.

Student Essay A

This is a high-range paper for the following reasons:

- Is on task.
- Shows complete understanding of the prompt and the passage.
- Indicates perceptive, subtle analysis (line 8).
- Maintains excellent topic adherence (lines 9, 17, 28, 39).
- Uses good "connective tissue" (repetition of key words).
- Chooses good specific references (lines 11, 12, 21, 35).
- Knows how to distinguish between the author and the narrator.
- Understands point of view well.
- Makes suggestions and inferences (lines 7, 20).
- Demonstrates good critical thinking.
- Is perceptive about syntax and the style of author (lines 27-33).



- Links techniques with character (line 34).
- Demonstrates mature language manipulation (line 34).
- Understands function of diction and motif (lines 40–44).



It's best to omit extraneous judgmental words from your essay (line 45).

This is obviously a mature, critical reader and writer. Using subtle inferences and implications, the writer demonstrates an understanding of the character of Gabriel as both Joyce presents him and as Gabriel views himself. There is nothing extraneous or repetitious in this essay. Each point leads directly and compellingly to the next aspect of Gabriel's character.

This is definitely a strong, high-range essay.

Student Essay B



This is a middle-range essay for the following reasons:

- Sets up an introduction which indicates the techniques that will be developed, but neglects to clearly set up the required discussion of how Gabriel views himself.
- Immediately establishes that the essay will address Gabriel's character as drawn by the narrator and seen by the reader.
- Addresses three aspects of Gabriel's character without fully developing the analysis of literary techniques.
- Adheres to the essay's topic.
- Uses "connective tissue" (lines 21, 28).
- Uses "echo words" (lines 8, 9, 10).
- Uses citations from the passages.
- Isolates some details to illustrate Gabriel's character (lines 31–32, 39).
- Confuses syntax with diction (lines 12–13).
- Lacks development of literary technique in paragraph 4.
- Displays faulty diction and syntax.
- Does not develop an important part of the prompt—how Gabriel views himself.
- Incorporates faulty logic at times (lines 44–49).

This essay is a solid, middle-range paper. The writer has a facility with literary analysis. Even though there are flashes of real insight, they are not sustained throughout the essay. There is a strong opening paragraph which makes it clear to the reader what the topic of the paper is. The writer obviously grasps Gabriel's character and the needed details to support the character analysis. But the weakness in this paper is the writer's incomplete development of the relationship of literary techniques to character analysis.

Note: Both essays have concluding paragraphs that are repetitive and largely unnecessary. It is best to avoid this type of ending.

Your Turn

Try a little reverse psychology. Now that you are thoroughly familiar with this passage, construct two or three alternative prompts. (Walk a little in the examiner's shoes.) This will help you gain insight into the process of test-making. Create two questions of your own. (See the Types of Prose Passage Essay Questions section of this chapter for ideas.)

How about sharing these samples with members of your class or study group and discussing possible responses?

1st alternative prompt for "The Dead"

2nd alternative prompt for "The Dead"

Rapid Review

After you've absorbed the ideas in this chapter, the following points will provide you with a quick refresher when needed:

- Familiarize yourself with the types of prose questions (prompts).
- Highlight the prompt and understand all the required tasks.
- Time your essay carefully.
- Spend sufficient time "working the passage" before you begin writing.
- Mark up the passage.
- Create a strong opening paragraph.
- Refer often to the passage.
- Use concrete details and quotes to support your ideas.
- Always stay on topic.
- Avoid plot summary.
- Include transitions and echo words.
- Check the models and rubrics for guidance for self-evaluation.
- Practice—vary the question and your approach.
- Share ideas with others.