

One Page Concept Review: Comparing Adequate to Inadequate Essays

Assuming a decent multiple choice score, you need to be writing essays that score in the 5-9 range (instead of the 0-4 range) if you wish to pass the test. Here are some general characteristics of both kinds of essays.

	Essays Scoring 0-4	Essays Scoring 5-9
essay length	less than a page and a half (given average handwriting and margins)	more than a page and a half (given average handwriting and margins)
intros in Q3 essays	does little to set up the book	introduces the main conflict and 2-3 characters
thesis	absent, focused on plot, or re-wording the prompt as a statement; no attempt to engage the big picture	some variation of “the author is doing this thing <i>for some specific reason</i> ,” connecting to either characterization, mood, theme, conflict, etc., which is to say, some idea of author’s purpose
topic sentences in body paragraphs	often absent; body paragraphs ramble and summarize	each body paragraph has a clearly defined purpose; that purpose is also unique to that paragraph (i.e., some attempt is being made to divide the argument)
organization	grouped by literary device and the ideas are repetitive across multiple paragraphs; little organization so that each paragraph reads like a list of disconnected ideas; a lot of summary with one sentence at the end of each body paragraph that should have been the topic sentence; no attempt to divide the argument in any way, so it’s just of list of random evidence	the argument develops (one paragraph sets up the next); literary devices are used as a means to analyze within a body paragraph, <i>not</i> as a way organize the paragraphs; the structure of the essay is clear, and it’s obvious that this structure was planned beforehand; evidence is used to prove the topic sentences are true and are not just a list of semi-connected ideas (or pure summary)
evidence	no attempt to set up evidence; in diction/imagery analysis it reads like random groups of words with no attempt to contextualize; in Q1/Q2 essays there is an over-reliance on paraphrase, so the argument is over-generalized (sometimes there is no specific quotation at all); in Q3 essays, no specific episodes from the book are used and no attempt is made to explain the context of events used as evidence	context sets up quotes and paraphrase; the reader understands who is saying the quote, when it is being said, and its context in the original text; diction/imagery analysis does not read like a list of words plucked at random from the text; there is at least one very specific piece of evidence in each body paragraph; in Q1/Q2 essays, ideas are grounded in text with the use of quotation; in Q3 essays, key moments from the novel or play are summarized before they are analyzed, and if a trend is being discussed, there is at least one specific paraphrase of an event that typifies that trend
explanation (this is the big one)	there is no connection of the evidence to the argument that is being made; after evidence there is a “what this shows” statement, but no attempt to explain how the inference is	evidence is used as a means to make an argument; any “what this shows” kind of statement is the <i>beginning</i> of analysis, not the end of it; typically, there are two to three sentences of explanation following each important piece of evidence; the writer explains

Essays Scoring 0-4

being made or what the implication for the argument is -- even if the "what this shows" statement is true; there is no attempt to sum up the how analysis fits into the larger argument, and body paragraphs read like lists of disconnected ideas; the writer seems to assume the reader already agrees with the thesis, so no attempt is made to persuade the reader or explain the writer's thinking; steps are often missing in the argument

literary devices

analysis is not done in terms of characterization, plot elements, conflict, diction/imagery, metaphor, symbol, irony, paradox, etc., and instead the writer just makes a lot of claims without using any means to break down the text; often the essay is just a list of devices with no attempt to integrate them into an argument (*Look! Here's a metaphor!*); steps are skipped when writing about a device (most commonly: diction/imagery analysis does not discuss connotation; metaphor/symbol analysis does not explain how the comparison or substitution works; and claims are made about tone or mood without explaining how that tone or mood was created)

irony

reads satirical, humorous, and ironic passages literally, and so completely misses the point

if the writer doesn't understand everything about a text

the writer does "whatever," and it often makes little sense, is repetitive, or is just (usually inaccurate) summary

conclusions

often missing; often a repetitive rewording of the intro; sometimes a personal "take" on how the text makes the writer feel

Essays Scoring 5-9

how inferences were made, and the reader isn't left asking, "So what?;" body paragraphs end with at least an implied sense of why that part of the argument was important to the argument in the thesis; evidence and analysis is purposeful, and it doesn't read as rambling or incoherent; the writer is focused on persuading the reader that their take on the text is a reasonable one, and that this take is helping the reader to understand the way the text works

the writer understands that literary devices are a means to break down a text so as to explain how the author is developing certain perceptions, ideas, or effects (that are linked to a larger purpose); these essays don't skip steps when using a close reading strategy to break down ideas

is always open to the possibility of irony, particularly if a text doesn't seem to make sense if taken at face value; if a text is satirical or humorous, these essays conclude with discussion of the target of humor or satire

the writer trusts the process and uses literary strategies to write about what s/he *does* know; often this involves using the connotation of words and images to draw conclusions about characterization or tone; thus, in the conclusion these essays are still able to say something valuable about the text

concludes with both a summary of the argument *and* how it connects to the big picture; often this is connecting to theme, but it can also be characterization, conflict, mood, etc.