

**DIRECTIONS: Read the sample essays for Ambai’s “Yellow Fish” and complete the activities that follow. This assignment is due Friday 9/28. If you turn in the assignment before eight hours have elapsed, there will be a small point deduction (-3 points). If you turn in the assignment between eight and twenty-four hours late there will be a larger point deduction (-10 points). If you turn in the assignment at any point after that, there will be a substantial point deduction (-20 points).**

### **Introductions and Thesis**

Opening paragraphs should set up the essay and establish the writer’s argument. This argument (the thesis statement) should be last in the paragraph, though it need not be a single sentence.

Information before the thesis should be background and set-up. Ideally it should include the name and author of the text, the broad outlines of the text, and the broad outlines of the approach that the essay writer will develop.

One can begin timed writings, however, with a one sentence first paragraph (the thesis statement), though this would not be as appropriate in an untimed setting. I would strongly prefer you not get in the habit of doing this unless you consistently have timing issues.

- 1) Read the first paragraph of the five sample essays. Choose one (make sure you identify which one you are writing about) and evaluate how well it accomplishes these two tasks. Things to look for include: a) does it establish some degree of background for the selection relevant to what the essay is going to argue; b) is it succinct or rambling (focused on the argument or introducing ideas that the essay never develops); c) is the thesis clear or confusing; and d) is the thesis really reflecting the argument that is being developed in the essay (reading the conclusion is a quick and dirty way of checking whether the argument remains focused or whether it has drifted).

### **Body Paragraphs**

Body paragraphs must divide the argument in some way; grouping by literary device or two disconnected reasons does not do this. The clarity of the structure is signaled, in turn, by the clarity of the topic sentences. Topic sentences do not necessarily have to be the first sentence of the paragraph, but they should be near the beginning.

Typically you should plan for two body paragraphs due to time constraints. Three body paragraphs (or more) usually results in underdevelopment of part of the argument, though writers who are able to generate quality writing at speed can (and sometimes should) move beyond the two body paragraph limit. In this regard, one has to know one’s strengths and weaknesses as a writer.

Topic sentences should establish what the paragraph will prove. This argument, in turn, should support the thesis in the introductory paragraph. Topic sentences need not be first in a body paragraph, but they should be close to the beginning to give the paragraph direction.

The simplest form of an argument is as follows:

Claim → Grounds (evidence, either direct quotation or paraphrase) →  
Warrant (explanation of the connection between claim and grounds)

Arguments that lack a claim read as plot summary; arguments without grounds are unpersuasive; and arguments with underdeveloped warrants are superficial. In general, the better the quality of your warrants, the better the essay grade will be. Quantity of evidence is nice (one should plan on incorporating at least two examples from text per body paragraph), but fewer well-chosen examples with strong explanations will always trump more examples with merely perfunctory explanations.

You should use parenthetical references, even though it is not required on the AP test. First, it builds ethos-- showing one understands how essays are written and that one is in full control of the writing process. Second, any writing that you do after high school will require citation as a matter of course, and this needs to become second nature. The correct format is as follows:

“quotation” OR specific paraphrase (page or line number) .

**Example:**

The fish takes “an arrogant leap” (79), which finalizes the idea that Anu feels that way.

**NOT**

The fish takes “an arrogant leap,” (79) which finalizes the idea that Anu feels that way.

**NOT**

The fish takes “an arrogant leap” (line 79), which finalizes the idea that Anu feels that way.

- 2) Outline EITHER essays 1, 2, and 3 OR essays 2, 4, and 5 with an abbreviated version of the thesis and the topic sentences for the body paragraphs. If a body paragraph does not have a clear topic sentence, make a best guess as to what the point of the paragraph was supposed to be and put that in brackets for your outline.
- 3) An argument should develop, not just list (which quickly becomes tedious to read). Thus, body paragraphs should set up the next paragraph in the chain of the argument. Compare the essay that does the best job of developing an integrated argument with the essay that does this least effectively, explaining how the superior structure better helps to convincingly argue the author’s point.
- 4) Evidence should establish something. One should also not under or over quote, instead using just what the writer needs to establish his or her point. Compare the essay that is most effective in its use of evidence to the one that does this least well. You are not just looking at the quality of the evidence, but the way that it is used and the effectiveness of the explanations in connecting the evidence to an actual argument (the topic sentences in each body paragraphs).

### **Conclusion**

At minimum a conclusion should summarize what you have proved. If this is all you do, however, you will be unlikely to receive an upper half score (7-9).

Instead, conclusions should actually conclude something (as opposed to merely summarizing). Most often this takes the form of an overarching inference made from the argument you have developed or an attempt to connect the argument to a broader idea developed in the text (a more generalized of theme, character, and conflict are all possibilities). The idea that conclusions should contain nothing new is a myth, though obviously the new material should arise naturally and organically from the argument you have been making.

Good introductions will never raise a score from one score point to the next, but a good conclusion can do this (and often does).

- 5) Evaluate any two of the conclusions in the sample essays. What is working, and what is not working? To what degree are they summing up the overall argument? To what degree are they suggesting the bigger picture? Read in context of the thesis, are they actually clarifying the overall scope and implications of the main argument, or do they just mechanically reword the thesis?