

Introduction to the Question Two Essay (Q2 Essay)

What is it?

The Question 2 essay (hereafter, the Q2 essay) is the second of the three essays on the AP exam. It will give you a prose selection (from a novel, short story, memoir, or play). You will then be asked to write an essay about the selection.

What types of essay prompts could I see?

Since I have the benefit of having seen the last four decades worth of prompts, I've done a statistical analysis (you will see these numbers again in more detail closer to the test). These are the three major categories: 1) Slightly less than half of the time students have been asked to determine a narrator's attitude toward something (character, society, theme, etc.); 2) Slightly more than a third of the time, students have been asked to analyze methods of characterization (including how the author establishes a character's point-of-view); and 3) About a fifth of the time, students have been asked to analyze a narrative technique that creates a specific impression or perception.

About half the time the cutting comes from pre-20th century, (usually) British prose.

What are some examples of specific prompts?

Here are some recent prompts to give you a flavor:

2013. D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915): The following passage focuses on the lives of the Brangwens, a farming family who lived in rural England during the late nineteenth century. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Lawrence employs literary devices to characterize the woman and capture her situation.

2014. The following passage is from the novel *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the author reveals the character of Moses. In your analysis, you may wish to consider such literary elements as point of view, selection of detail, and imagery.

2015. The following excerpt is from the opening of *The Beet Queen*, a 1986 novel by Louise Erdrich. Read the passage carefully. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze how Erdrich depicts the impact of the environment on the two children. You may wish to consider such literary devices as tone, imagery, selection of detail, and point of view.

A word of advice: no matter what the prompt asks you to do, treat it as a two-part prompt.

Sometimes the prompt asks you to connect the task to some larger idea in the work. Sometimes it does not. Even when it doesn't, though, the high scoring essays usually do. The last part of the conclusion should address a theme or (more commonly in this essay) the writer's overall strategy (characterization, the nature of the conflict, or some other aspect of the writer's craft).

Do I have to use the literary devices that they suggest in the prompt?

No. You may use some of them, or none of them. One thing you should definitely NOT do is organize your essay by literary device (one body paragraph about characterization, one about imagery, etc.). Essays of this type are mechanical and superficial. They almost never score above a 5 (the lowest possible passing grade).

How do I structure the essay?

Four paragraph essays work best given the time constraint (I. Intro and thesis; II. Body Paragraph; III. Body Paragraph; IV. Conclusion with discussion of some big picture idea in the text). It is not acceptable to have one long paragraph (you are no longer in eighth grade).

The Before/After structure is an easy structure for this essay. Look for some turning point or tone shift in the passage to establish the two body paragraphs. This structure essentially asks you to chunk the text into two obvious parts, writing about the writer's strategy for each part. The conclusion addresses the larger meaning or the overall structure of the work. This can be a theme (if you have enough information), a larger conclusion about a character, or a discussion of the nature of the conflict being developed.

Before/After

- I. Intro and thesis
- II. Up until X moment, Y is true (Y=an interpretation, not an event)
- III. After X moment, Z is true (Z=an interpretation, not an event)
- IV. Sum up what you have proved; change shows something important in the text (from thesis)

These three also work for most Q2 prompts:

- **Contrast** [I. Intro and thesis; II. Concept X; III. Contrasts with Concept Y; IV. Sum up what you have proved; difference/Preference for X or Y shows something important in the text (from thesis)]
- **Idea/Qualification** [I. Intro and thesis; II. Idea/Expectation/Appearance; III. Idea/Expectation/Appearance is qualified/contradicted/reversed; IV. Sum up what you have proved; the gap between the two shows something important in the text (from thesis)]
- **Cause/Effect** [I. Intro and thesis; II. X is true; III. X causes Y; IV. Sum up what you have proved; Y shows something important in the text (from thesis)]

Do **NOT** structure your essay by literary device. Do **NOT** write a plot summary.

What should be in the introduction?

Title, author, and genre (novel, short story, or play) [Acronym: TAG]. You also want to set up the text with character introductions, set up the conflict you will be writing about, or talk in general about information the reader needs to know about your approach to the task. This will typically be less developed than in either Q1 or Q3 essays, since you will have less information to set up.

The last sentence needs to be your thesis (what you will be proving). Do not copy your thesis from the wording of the prompt (it should be narrowed, and it should be in your own words).

The intros for the Q2 essays tend to be shorter than intros for the other essays. This isn't a problem.

What should be in the conclusion?

1) Sum up what you have proved, and 2) discuss how this fits into the larger picture of the work as a whole. This may be thematic, but it probably won't be, since you'll lack the context to really make any kind of convincing argument about theme. Instead discuss the writer's overall strategy in the passage. To what end is the writer using characterization, developing the setting, creating a mood, etc.? What is the purpose of this passage, and what vital piece of information does the passage establish that the reader should understand?