

The Ten Commandments of the Advanced Placement Literature examination

1. I am the Prompt, thy Prompt; thou shalt have no other Prompt before me. Thou shalt read the Prompt with rapt attention; the Prompt is thy friend. Thou shalt address the Prompt. Thou shalt not just get the general idea of the Prompt, nor shalt thou fight the Prompt or substitute your own ideas for the Prompt.
2. Thou shalt not postpone, omit, or bury thy Thesis Statement.
3. Thou shalt not dwell with Plot-Summary, nor shalt thou cohabit with Padding of Writing, for it is an abomination in my sight. Neither shalt thou be satisfied with mere Reading Comprehension for thy Prompt is an analytic and interpretive Prompt.
4. Thou shalt not commit Free-Floating Generalization, but shall support and develop thine every assertion with Concrete Details.
5. Thou shalt not mistake complexity for confusion, or subtlety for indecisiveness; thou shalt not attribute thine own insensitivity or ignorance to authorial ineptitude. The fact that thou gettest not the point doesn't mean that the passage hath no point: thou hast missed the point and thus must reread more carefully.
6. Thou shalt read every Multiple-Choice question with the same exquisite care that thou devotest to the Essay Prompt: thou shalt not "get the drift." By the same token, shalt thou strive to read what the writer actually wrote, not what thou expectest him or her to have written.
7. Thou shalt not finish early. Thou shalt spend an abundance of thy time planning thine essay responses and any time left over editing them.
8. Honor thy percentages by guessing thoughtfully when thou art not sure of the answers. Thou shalt guess when thou knowest not the answers and can eliminateth two of the four answers.
9. Thou shalt not merely identify stylistic and literary devices, but shalt show how they function and provide examples.
10. Thou shalt never permit thyself to become discouraged: I am the prompt, thy Prompt. Thou shalt maintain thy focus, attention, and confidence. Yea, though thou hast totally mutilated thy last essay, the next essay maketh a fresh start.

—Martin Beller, AP Language & Literature teacher