

TIP

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.

KEY IDEA

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 complex 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.

The Dead

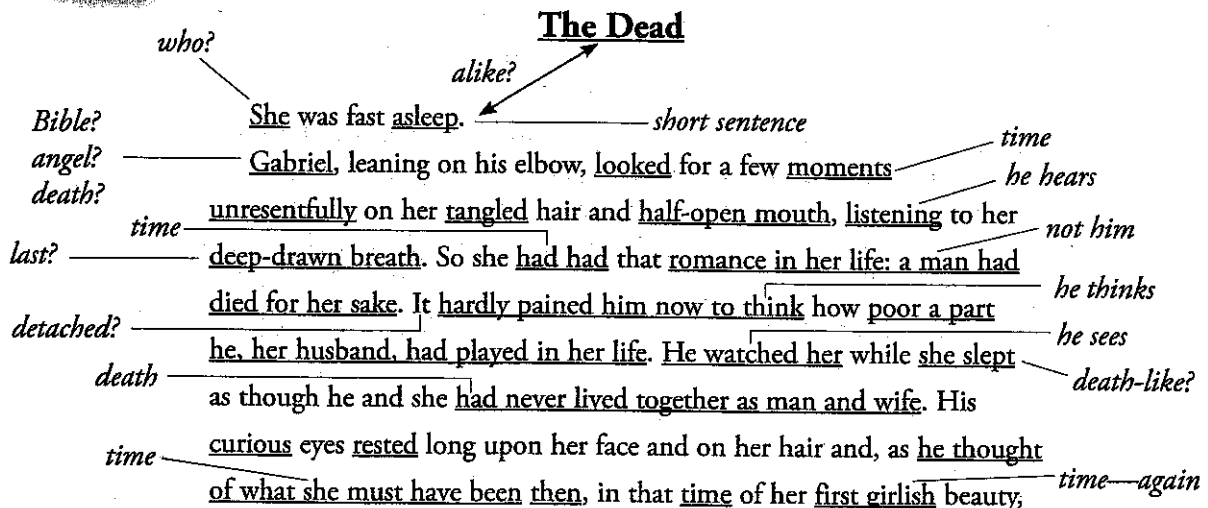
She was fast asleep.

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.

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 its 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.

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.

KEY IDEA



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 15

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. 20 25

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. 30

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 35

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. 40

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. 45

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. 10 15 20

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 proceeded?" 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 6–1 scale, with 6 the highest and 1 the lowest. Since we are not there with you to personally rate your essay and to respond to your style and approach, we are going to list the criteria for high-, middle-, and low-range papers. These criteria are based on our experience with rubrics and reading AP Literature essays. 45

A HIGH-range essay can be a 6 or a 5. MIDDLE refers to essays in the 4–3 range. And the LOW-scoring essays are rated 2–1.

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

Rating the Student Essays

High-Range Essay (5, 6)

KEY IDEA

- Indicates complete understanding of the prompt.
- The thesis clearly presents a possible interpretation and indicates how the support will be developed.
- 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.

Middle-Range Essay (3, 4)

- Refers accurately to the prompt.
- Refers accurately to the literary devices used by Joycé.
- 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.

Low-Range Essay (1, 2)

- 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.

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 the 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).



KEY IDEA



TIP

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 both as 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.)

KEY IDEA

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