

Preparing for the AP English Lit Open Question

Advance preparation for the AP test will help you in two ways: with good notes and study aids, you will have a way to get mentally ready for the test, and you will avoid the stress of trying to go back and retrieve information that is stored in a dusty corner of your memory. Use this scaffold to build reference frames for your knowledge of literature: adapt it for each book or play you read, and voila! instant study aids in April, as the Test looms. Page numbers will guide you back into the work just before the exam if you need to refresh your memory on specific scenes that are crucial to the work. This can be formatted as numbered items or bullets, but should be typed on a single page (single-spaced and on the back if necessary).

Include the following information:

1. Title, Author, Date (and literary period)
2. List of Characters (make sure you spell the names correctly). Write a BRIEF character sketch for the major characters, and list the minor ones.
3. List of Place Names (hard to write about *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, without being able to talk about Pemberly, or about *Heart of Darkness* without knowing that it is set in the Congo)
4. List of Major Events, Scenes, Speeches/Conversations. **Give page numbers for quick reference.** Mark these passages in your book, if you have your own copy. In many cases this list will be chronological. In some cases (*Heart of Darkness*, or *Wuthering Heights*, for example) you will need to have two lists: the order of appearance in the structure of the book -- including the flashbacks; and the order of appearance in time.
5. List of major SHORT (significant) quotations that would be good to insert into an essay. Memorize these! Don't use big, long quotes that you can never remember, and choose quotes that are important to the ideas in the book, or beautifully phrased, or both.
6. Social/Political/Philosophical Agenda(s) of the Author. Why was this book written? What insight into society or human nature (the human condition) does this book offer? Any essay you write must hook into this larger perspective/understanding of the book. What passages would you cite to illustrate the core of the author's ideas? You will need to do some serious thinking about this, distilling what you learned from your own reading (NOT from booknotes!!)
7. Technical, structural, and stylistic strategies and achievements of the author in this book. You should be able to write about HOW the novel or play is put together/written, as well as WHAT IT IS ABOUT. Address use of language, figurative language, sentence structure, point of view, irony, (or other tone), diction, symbols, structure of the novel, and use of detail.
8. Describe the opening and closing scenes, especially the endings, where authors polish off final impressions and ideas. Explain how they connect to the author's purpose.