Attention to details makes a difference in the way your paper is received by me and the AP readers in May. So now it is time to take stock and see what we can do immediately to fix some of these problems.

1. **Your paper must be legible.** Handwriting counts. On several papers, I simply gave up trying to figure out what the people were saying because it was impossible to read the handwriting. The AP people are forgiving; as much as they can, they will try to read the essay, and I have had students who have passed the test even with abysmal handwriting. However, if you make reading a pleasure for the examiner and not a chore, that has got to work in your favor. Also, large childish scrawl makes a paper look amateurish and unsophisticated. **Good handwriting matters; the responsibility is on you to communicate your ideas; it should not be the reader’s job to untangle the mess. You need to spend the time proofreading.** There were many errors that could have been corrected if you had taken a few extra minutes to read your paper over carefully. At this point in the game, your sentences should make sense!! Unfortunately, there were a few papers where the writers rushed so much that their minds were ahead of their hands. Don’t make the reader work so hard—you will pay for it in the end.

2. **DO NOT WRITE A LAUNDRY LIST OF DEVICES:** “The writer uses diction, imagery, and syntax to get his point across.” Every minute you open your mouth you are using diction, imagery and syntax. Therefore, it renders your sentence illogical and immaterial.

3. **Put quotation marks around sentences, phrases, or even single words that you have lifted out of the passage.** Many people just copy the line without putting quotes around it. This is an absolute must; otherwise, you are plagiarizing the passage.

4. **Use the last name of the writer.** You are not acquainted with the writer so you do not have the right to call him by his first name. Just use last names. It’s standard form. Don’t call her Joan! (or in one memorable case, Doan!!) That person also thought the writer was a man!

5. **Don’t start every paragraph in the same way.** Can you imagine how monotonous it is to read: quotation, explanation, quotation, explanation, quotation, explanation. I darn near fell asleep!!!! **Don’t even start paragraphs with a quotation.** Quotes should fit neatly and snuggly inside the paragraph. If you are only going to use a phrase or one word, it should fit nicely into the rest of the sentence.

6. **Don’t overquote.** Some people quote more than they write. This is a miserable excuse for an essay: long quotes and one sentence for commentary or explanation. Then another long quote or several short ones: look how I filled up my essay. Stringing quotes is not the way to go. Select judiciously those quotes that will advance your ideas.

7. **Write more.** Some people wrote two sides and a bit of a third. Skipping lines and allowing for handwriting, this would only amount to one side of a page in a test booklet. That’s not enough!! **The more you write, the more likely you will nail what they want you to see. HOWEVER, a longer essay is not necessarily a good one.**

8. **Don’t make sweeping statements about life or any one group in particular:** “Often, a huge disappointment in someone’s life can cause that person to lose respect for themselves”

9. **Don’t be so literal all the time:** look for nuances—what you think of as literal may be a metaphor for something

10. **Don’t write sentences that make no sense or say nothing.** These are the ones I call GNDN- GOES NOWHERE, DOES NOTHING. I actually read the following:

    - “The passage starts off with the writer just causily (sic) talking about some experiences and ends with her explaining her story with such passion that is so strong”
    - “This passage shows that not until you are turned back upon oneself to examine ‘one’s marked cards’ can you give yourself respect.”
“Didion’s style and tone helps emphasize her attitudes toward this unfortunate event.”

“The narrator throughout the passage in multiple lines bring up reoccurring (sic) words, which is part of what their style is and the emphasis on the narrator’s attitude.”

“The two poems have similarities and they have differences.”

11. Remember: commentary. What is commentary? It is your take on the poem or prose passage. Your opinions matter. You are not a mindless drone who simply makes accurate generalizations on what the poem or prose passage is about. Your imagination, your values, your insight are priceless. SOMEONE IS ASKING FOR YOUR OPINION!!

12. Don’t rely on monotonous phrasing or monotonous organization. One student talks about diction this way: This conjures up the image of…. or that conjures up the idea that…. If you find yourself using any phrase more than once, knock it off. Also vary the way you present ideas. Some people follow a monotonous pattern of quote, commentary…. Quote commentary… BORING!!!!

13. LEARN IMPLY AND INFER! REMEMBER: The writer implies, the reader infers!!

14. FORGET THE READER- Some people write “the reader sees this or the reader sees that.” Who else is looking at it? Just make the statement. Instead of saying “the reader sees the heartbreak of the speaker,” say “The speaker is heartbroken.”

15. Don’t assume that the writer and the speaker are one. The writer often creates a persona to speak for him. Remember? Unless you know for sure that the author is the speaker, don’t assume it! And at least spell the person’s name right, for crying out loud.

16. For the last time: dump the following words: probably, possibly, maybe, could be, might be, almost, etc. These words make you sound unsure of yourself. WRITE LIKE A LION, NOT LIKE A LAMB! WHOEVER HEARD OF RAMPAGING LAMBS??? RAMPAGE MY LIONS! SIC ‘EM!!!

17. The word is supposed not suppose. I was supposed to do this last week. He was supposed to pick me up, etc. If you use “suppose” by itself, then you say this: I suppose you are going along too. I suppose I must go to Gold’s class after all. The same is true with prejudice and prejudiced. He is a very prejudiced man. I hate prejudice.

18. Finally, do not go on and on about today’s society. Stick to the book, the poem or the passage. Do not make sweeping generalizations about life. When a student writes about today’s society, it’s a dead giveaway that she didn’t read the book.

19. Do not write “in the play,” “in the novel,” “in the passage” etc. at the end of a sentence.

20. Use apostrophes to show possession. This is Chad’s book. These are the speaker’s feelings about his beloved. Do not use apostrophes just because you add an “s” to a word! Then you end up with things like see’s. ARGH!!!!!

FINALLY, WE COME TO THE MOST IMPORTANT PART:

21. Analyze, don’t summarize. Some people think if they simply restate what the passage is saying and they do so accurately, then they have completed the assignment. EK!!!! Did you look for and consider the following:
   ○ Diction: What do individual words or phrases mean and indicate about the theme??
   ○ Tone: What was the attitude that the writer had, what emotions are being transmitted to you? How do they change?
   ○ Style: What was her syntax like? What kind of language did she use? Did she use repetition of words or concepts?
   ○ Literary devices: metaphors?? similes?? anything??