

AP English Language & Composition: Final Essay and Exam

As part of your final exam's cover sheet, you write, "I'm desperate for a grade in the high 80s (if this is even possible in this class/course)." I want to offer you some feedback on this, because you are about to enter a course with similar standards and expectations; if you can see past numbers and embrace the process, you will be fine, but if you linger in this grade-driven paradigm, you will be frustrated again and again.

First, I want you to recognize that you never saw me after your pre-exam metacognition scores were given. You and you alone received pages of writing from me, all of it an attempt to help you; I never saw or heard from you, however, and that opportunity slipped away. That can't happen in your senior year. You have to meet with your teacher -- and while she has the same standards that I do, she's a bit more approachable -- to learn how to correct weaknesses and deficiencies in your writing.

Second, I want you to recognize that those weaknesses and deficiencies can be obvious or subtle. In this essay and attached metacognition (which is a nice touch, by the way), you make some simple errors (e.g., writing "i" instead of "I") and some big errors. In the latter camp is the last sentence: "Perfection is going to affect women if the image is appearance-focused and disseminates a pure and or limpid implication about a female's body figure as an object." I want to parse that with you, not just because you need to start to internalize some of these lessons, but because you need to understand how critical an ending is.

1) You don't mean *perfection* there. You mean the media's portrayal of perfection, and those are very different things; when your essay works, it works because it says exactly that.

2) Writing "the image is appearance-focused" is confusing in the same way. You have to use the precise words, or you end up saying what you don't mean.

3) The crippling part of this sentence is "pure and or limpid implication." That phrase says and means next to nothing, because "limpid" is obviously a word chosen from a thesaurus. Yes, it means "clear" or "unclouded," but it is never used in this context; even if you were trying for metaphorical, you can't attach "limpid" to "implication," because something implied cannot also be pure and unclouded. That's dissonance at the level of basic units of thought.

The *idea* in that sentence -- what it's trying to say -- is good, and I need that feedback to be clear to you, too. You have a strong essential question and a decent understanding of how to explore it. To have made this paper effective enough for the score you're desperate for, you would need both a revision of that exploration and analysis *and* a line-by-line revision of the convoluted syntax and diction. And that would take sitting down one-on-one with your teacher.

You had moments of disengagement and arrogance this year, and I have enough respect for all of my students not to lie to you about that. You dismissed assignments and ignored feedback. Don't ignore this. I want to see you succeed next year, to figure out exactly how to turn your nascent strengths into the grades you want. They won't be given to you, though. You're going to have to earn them.