

AP English Language & Composition: Final Essay and Exam

First, let me remind you that you were given a different prompt, at least in the sense that research and the synthesis of other authors were not part of your rubric. You wrote a kind of general argument, although it's closer to a true dialectic -- and I'm using *dialectic* with several of its definitions in mind, from the exploration of eternal ideas to the systematic juxtaposition of contradictory ideas in order to resolve the contradiction.

Whatever we call the prompt, your response is highly effective. Or, to put it less clinically, I could say this: You've written a moving and elegant treatment of what perfection means to us, and I loved reading it. The only significant criticism (I will offer notes on many other things in a moment) is that you rely on colons to connect ideas, and you don't always use them correctly. The other side to that? You are a writer, and you have a naturally evolving style; sometimes that means you overuse a punctuation mark, because that's the thing your writer's brain is stuck on. I have been using "sort of" and "kind of" and similar qualifiers a lot lately, because I've been reading David Foster Wallace. As long as you learn to use your authorial tics correctly, you ought to embrace them.

Your question to me: *Are the breaks effective or even necessary in separating the introduction, development, and conclusion?* The short answer: yes to the first one, no to the second one. Since it would be strange to have the one and not the other, you need to move that second separating line to after your thirteenth paragraph, where it sets up a shift to the first-person again.

Other possible revision notes:

I will argue that paragraph seven should go at the end of paragraph six. The "distinction between perfection and precision" starts with your working definition, and that definition ought to go with its introduction. It doesn't read as cleanly in its own paragraph.

That said, your working definition is splendid. To call perfection "inelastic" and "endgame" (without the article, which makes it even more effective) is inventive and evocative.

In other paragraphing revisions: I will argue that you should start a new one when you introduce *style* as a central term. It needs a bit of space, since it ultimately fills out your thesis.

Overall, the direction and shape of this response is remarkable and remarkably consistent. Page four is slightly weaker in arrangement, especially internally, but I'm probably picking nits there (as a colleague of mine used to say).

A question: Is the shift in paragraph fourteen deliberately contained in the phrase "at least to me"? Because that's how you shift the paper from the more philosophical consideration of mathematical perfection to, as your annotations phrase it, "its narrative roots." Syntactically, it's kind of brilliant: It moves the first-person plural "we" back to the "I" that has to speak the last line.

Now, on another note:

This kind of writing is unique, and not just because it answers a prompt effectively. It gets into its readers' heads, as it has gotten into mine; I'm using colons a bit more than usual, if you look carefully at the commentary that proceeds this, and I'm considering a prompt for next year's AP students that incorporates your essential question and response. Thank you for that.