

**Strategies for answering Question 27
on the June 2012
New York State English Regents**

In this section of the test, the instructions will ask you to write a single paragraph about **one of the** passages (excerpt or poem). The instructions will be something like this:

Choose a specific literary element (e.g., theme, characterization, structure, point of view, etc.) or literary technique (e.g., symbolism, irony, figurative language, etc.) used by **one** of the authors. Using specific details from **either** Passage I (the excerpt) **or** Passage II (the poem), in a well-developed paragraph, show how the author uses that element or technique to develop the passage.

The teachers who grade this paragraph will be looking for several things that you get right so that they can smile, give the paragraph a “2” (full score, the highest you can get) and then move on to grade the next exam. Your paragraph will be read, to be sure, but teachers will be scanning for several key elements that tell them that you understand the texts, the task, and can write a “well-developed” paragraph.

Teachers will be looking for the following elements to give your paragraph a full score of 2:

- Present a well-developed paragraph
 - *Make it make sense. Don't ramble – follow instructions*
- Provides an appropriate explanation of the literary element or technique chosen
 - *It's critical that you are familiar with the element/technique you're going to be using. Be familiar with the most common techniques before you go into the test!*
- Supports the explanation with clear and appropriate evidence from the text
 - *Show evidence how the literary technique or element is used in the text*
- Uses language that is appropriate
 - *This is a formal essay, not a text message. Forget about shorthand (cuz, u, LOL, etc.). English teachers are serious about language and will not be impressed with your essay if they read words like these.*
- May exhibit errors in conventions that do not hinder comprehension
 - *A misspelled word is not a “death sentence,” but make every attempt to spell a word correctly or at least spell it so that it won't be read as a totally different word than what you intend. However, points are **not** taken off automatically if a word is misspelled.*

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- *Bad handwriting, however, **may lower your grade** for a simple reason: Teachers are under a lot of pressure to get through a lot of exams and the clock is ticking, e.g. we need to get all the exams graded by a certain date and time. If a teacher has to re-read a paragraph because of sloppy handwriting, you have already subconsciously antagonized that teacher and that's not the position you want to be in. Remember – you are trying to **impress** the teacher, **not irritate** him or her! Enough said; write clearly.*

NOTE: Use **either** the excerpt **or** the poem, not both. If you forget and use both, it will be a waste of your time, and the teacher is instructed to only grade the **better** portion of your paragraph that refers to only one passage.

First, some **overall** suggestions (these would also apply to Question 26 as well):

1. Avoid making your paragraph into a personal statement of your own philosophy by using phrases like "...I think that..." or "...In my experience...".
 - a. Be confident and assertive! You have something to say about a topic, so just say it directly.
 - i. This is your opportunity to show (or at least pretend) that you have extraordinary insight into the human character. Use sentences like "Relationships can be rewarding or devastating, but they are what make us human." Instead of a sentence like "In my experience, relationships can be rewarding or sometimes not so good, but I think that they are what make us like, you know, human." Big difference between the two examples; the first one is written by someone who is confident and the second example is wimpy and vague.
2. Avoid "fillers". Fillers are words and phrases that are the equivalent of a basketball player bouncing the ball 15 times at the foul line before finally shooting the ball through the hoop! Fillers are easily spotted by the reader and put you at a disadvantage as a writer. Why? It gives the impression that you're "stalling for time" because you don't know what to say. Here's are examples of **how not to start a paragraph**:
 - a. What I'm going to be writing about today is...(no one over the age of 8 would ever start a paragraph with these words).
 - b. I'm going to write a well-developed paragraph in which I will use ideas from **both** Passage I (the excerpt) and Passage II (the poem) to establish a controlling idea...

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3. Make your paragraph not too long and not too short.
 - a. You don't have the time to fill your paragraph with superfluous¹ sentences that don't propel your ideas along, and teachers certainly don't want to read your random thoughts (no offense). Make every sentence count and if what you want to write doesn't directly relate to your idea, leave it out.
4. Don't waste time and don't leave early.
 - a. Be focused during the exam. Clear your mind of anything other than your task, which is passing the exam and graduating from high school. Nothing else matters during these three hours (or more). **NOTHING!**
 - b. **Do not**, under any circumstances, think that if you've finished the exam and you have time left that it's OK to leave. You can always make an answer better and you can always check your answers on the multiple choice section.
 - c. It's natural to feel like you just "have to get out of here or I'm gonna explode!!" It's OK to have these feelings, just **not** OK to act on them. Accept that it's not natural for you or any other teenager to sit still and quiet for any length of time, and also accept the fact that, during these 3 hours, **you need to play by someone else's rules**. Is it fair? No. Is life fair? Hardly. Will it kill you to stay and check your work? I don't think so, and neither do you. Enough said.

Here are some guidelines, suggestions, and examples from other students' essays for your Question 27 essay:

1. Begin by stating directly and clearly which literary element/technique you will be using.
 - a. Examples:
 - i. In passage one, the narrator used characterization to describe the teacher.
 - ii. In passage I, the author makes excellent use of symbolism to emphasize Ezra's love for Mrs. Scarlotti.
 - iii. In the second passage, the author uses the literary device, imagery.

¹ Being beyond what is required or sufficient

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- b. **As an option**, you may want to **begin** your paragraph with a sentence that gives a definition of the literary element/device you will be using, such as “Imagery is the author’s use of descriptive words to allow the reader to picture what they are describing.”
2. For the balance of the paragraph, show how the author uses the device/technique to develop the passage.
- a. Use specific quotations from the text and follow the quotation with a line number.
- i. Example:
1. An example of the author’s use of imagery is when he describes the “meadow grass in its highest ... the thick smell of campion blossoms.” This allows the reader to picture the father and son in a meadow with tall grass. You can smell the same things that are supposed to be present.
 2. One technique that the author uses is metaphor when he says in line 7, “The moon is a golden apple sliced in half by earth’s shadow.”
 3. Another technique that the author uses is simile in lines 13 and 14. “Their blossoms are like larger, paler stars in the sky spread at our feet.”
- b. Although the instructions only ask you to use **one** literary technique/device, it’s OK to use more than one literary technique or device, as long as you back it up with references to the text.
3. With this particular paragraph, it is not essential that you write a concluding sentence.