

Unpacking the Essay Prompt Worksheet

Name: _____

Text Studied: _____

Date: _____

Part A: Understanding the Prompt

Essay Prompt

Step 1: Read the Question Carefully

Read the prompt at least twice.

After reading, answer:

What do you think the question is asking?

Step 2: Underline the Key Words

Write the most important words and phrases from the prompt.

Key Word/Phrase	Why is it important?
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Step 3: Identify the Directive Verb

What is the directive verb?

☐ Analyse

- ☐ Discuss
- ☐ Explore
- ☐ Evaluate
- ☐ Examine
- ☐ Explain
- ☐ Reveal
- ☐ Show
- ☐ Other: _____

What does this directive verb require you to do?

Step 4: Identify the Question Type

Tick the box that best matches the prompt.

- ☐ Agree or disagree
- ☐ Discuss an idea
- ☐ Quotation-based question
- ☐ "How" question
- ☐ Evaluate a statement
- ☐ Character-focused
- ☐ Theme-focused
- ☐ Technique-focused
- ☐ Other: _____

What approach should you take?

Step 5: Rephrase the Question

Rewrite the prompt in your own words.

Part B: The Three Essential Questions

WHAT?

What ideas and themes are most relevant?

Theme 1:

Theme 2:

Theme 3:

What is the text really about?

HOW?

How does the author communicate these ideas?

List techniques, devices or methods that may help answer the question.

Technique	Example from the text

WHY?

Why are these ideas important?

What message is the author communicating?

What does the author want the audience to understand?

Part C: Authorial Intent

Why did the author create this text?

How does the author's context influence the message?

What values or beliefs are reflected in the text?

Part D: Quotation Analysis (Complete if applicable)

Quotation from the prompt:

Key words in the quotation:

1.

2.

3.

4.

What does the quotation suggest?

Part E: Planning Your Response

Draft Thesis Statement

Body Paragraph 1

Main Argument:

Evidence:

Technique(s):

Link to Question:

Body Paragraph 2

Main Argument:

Evidence:

Technique(s):

Link to Question:

Body Paragraph 3

Main Argument:

Evidence:

Technique(s):

Link to Question:

Final Checklist

Before writing, can you answer these questions?

- ☐ I understand every word in the prompt.
- ☐ I have identified the directive verb.
- ☐ I know the question type.
- ☐ I can explain WHAT the text is saying.
- ☐ I can explain HOW the author conveys meaning.
- ☐ I can explain WHY the ideas are important.
- ☐ I have considered authorial intent.
- ☐ My thesis directly answers the question.
- ☐ My body paragraphs each address a different aspect of the prompt.
- ☐ I can refer back to the key words from the prompt throughout my essay.

Golden Rule

Don't write the essay you prepared. Write the essay that answers the question in front of you.