

AP English Literature and Composition

Hamlet Writing Assignment

Tuesday 8 October: Hot seat opens for the *Hamlet* paper

Hot seat closes 22 October; paper due Wednesday 23 October

Please make sure you have had your college essay stamped October 16 or earlier.

For this assignment, you may choose a creative-writing or an academic-writing option.

I. Creative

Your assignment is to write a missing soliloquy. In *Hamlet*, all of the characters can be said to reflect some aspect of Hamlet's character, while also expressing their own ideas. Choose a character who doesn't get to speak alone—Gertrude, Bernardo, Marcellus, Horatio—or a character who might have something new to say at a different point in the play. Probably, given Tom Stoppard, you should avoid writing for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern unless you are sure you have something new to say.

In a brief artist's statement, make clear what the parameters of your soliloquy are. Will you write in modern English, modern English in iambic pentameter? On what basis should this piece be graded?

Your soliloquy should come in at about 30–40 lines, roughly the length of the “To be...” soliloquy.

Creative assignments are always graded on the effort (keep and present your drafts), the degree to which you meet the assignment (and, thus, the specificity and achievement of the artist's statement), and the quality of the product (including the ambition of what you have attempted).

II. Academic

Write an essay on one of the following topics.

1. **Inside Out.** Most major characters in *Hamlet* can be read as reflections of some component of Hamlet's psychology. Choose three major characters and discuss the ways they add to the play through their own amplifications of Hamlet's traits.
2. **Aristotle.** Consider a balanced and well reasoned selection of Aristotle's primary tenets of tragedy—the character of the the tragic hero, his hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis—the definition of tragedy, catharsis, the return to homeostasis. How does Shakespeare's use and disuse of Aristotle's principles affect the reader's/viewer's experience of the play?
3. **Madness.** The guards are afraid of the ghost's potential to lead Hamlet to madness. Hamlet decides early in the play to “put an antic disposition on” (1.5.170). Ophelia becomes mad and dies. You may address this topic in one of two ways: 1. To what degree and when is Hamlet actually mad, according to a definition of madness that the play itself generates? or 2. How does the play use madness as a theme to promote its ideas?