

**Breaking Down Prompts:  
Reading the Prompt: The Steps**

1. First, students must start breaking down the prompt by identifying the TAG (Title, Author, and Genre). This information is found in most AP Prompts. They must label each with a **T**, an **A**, and a **G** respectively.
2. Second, students must evaluate elements of exposition presented in the prompt. This is commonly found in the first few sentences of the prompt itself. I tell them to look for three particular elements that relate to exposition (or exigence): information about the author, information about the characters, and information about the universal ideas explored in the stories they are about to read. I have them mark this with little stars on the prompt.
3. Third, students move to identifying the *Command* element of the prompt. The *Command* is a simple way that I force students to focus on the SAME THING every time they read a prompt. Essentially, I have them constantly remind themselves that they need to ANALYZE in their papers, not merely summarize, describe, or identify. So, locating the *Command* always requires them to find the word (or variant) of “analyze”; then, students must underline from analyze to the end of the sentence. Like I said, this is a reminder technique.
4. Finally, and most important, students must create the *Conquer Question*. Remember, this is the MOST IMPORTANT element in this whole process. Generating this question is done by looking in the *Command* for the authorial action verb that follows the word “analyze.” The key verb here is USUALLY, but not always, the infinitive that follows the word (or variant) of “analyze.” Once students have found the infinitive, students must double underline from the infinitive to the end of the sentence. Then, they generate a question by asking themselves, “While only looking at the double underlined text, what can’t I know until I have actually read this essay?” THE QUESTION THEY CREATE MUST START WITH THE WORD “WHAT”!!!! This question also may not have anything to do with the words *literary (or poetic) techniques (or elements)* all of these phrases fall outside of the double underlined area. Students may not look outside that area of the prompt to create this question. In my experience, students struggle with this at first, so I consistently remind them that they must only look at the words that are DOUBLE UNDERLINED and ask “What don’t I know?” Again, you’ll see that the literary strategies language is not double underlined; therefore, it can’t be in their question.
- 5.
6. Fill in the chart on the following page using the information you marked in 1-4:

Access the prompt for Question 2 (page 3), found at the link below:

[https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/apc/ap10\\_frq\\_eng\\_lit\\_formb.pdf](https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/apc/ap10_frq_eng_lit_formb.pdf)

TAG	Exposition from the prompt	C and C	Conquer Answer
T:		<u>Command:</u>	<u>Complex Answer in Text:</u>  <i>(Answer After Reading)</i>
A:		<u>Conquer Question(s):</u>	<u>Universal Ideas:</u>  <i>(Answer After Reading)</i>
G:			

**Complexity:** *When elements in literature include some, or all, of the following qualities:*

- **Layers:**
  - Kind, industrious, and jovial
  - Oppressive, Violent, ominous, and foreboding
- **Contradictory:**
  - Seemingly innocent, yet maniacal
  - Outwardly comforting, yet slightly offsetting
- **Paradoxical:**
  - Loving, yet demanding justice at all costs
  - Caring about one's self, yet being entirely self-sacrificial

#### **Universal Ideas<sup>1</sup>**

*A non-comprehensive list of universal ideas derived from an original document provided by John Williamson*

Addiction	Fidelity	Poverty
Adventure	Freedom	Power
Alienation	Friendship	Predestination
Ambition	Gluttony	Pride
Anarchy	Grace	Progress
Apathy	Greed	Purity
Apostasy	Growth	Race
Atonement	Hate	Reality
Beauty	Heresy	Rebirth
Belonging	Heroism	Redemption
Betrayal	Hope	Regret
Brotherhood	Humility	Renewal
Change	Identity	Revenge
Chaos	Imagination	Salvation
Comfort	Immorality	Savagery
Community	Immortality	Secrecy
Companionship	Individuality	Sentimentality
Conformity	Infidelity	Sin
Corruption	Innocence	Sloth
Courage	Jealousy	Solidarity
Curiosity	Joviality	Solitude
Death	Justice	Stability
Defiance	Judgment	Struggle
Desire	Knowledge	Submission
Destruction	Life	Success
Dishonesty	Longing	Suppression
Disobedience	Loyalty	Survival
Disbelief	Lust	Sustainability
Dominance	Madness	Temptation
Doubt	Materialism	Tradition
Duty	Maturation	Trust
Dystopia	Misunderstanding	Truth
Ego	(Im)Morality	Vanity
Empathy	Mortality	Vengeance
Encouragement	Naivety	War
Enlightenment	Nostalgia	Work
Eternity	Obligation	Youthfulness
Failure	Obsession	
Faith	Patriotism	<i>Etc</i>
Family	Peace	
Fantasy	Perseverance	
Fear	Pleasure	

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<sup>1</sup> Modified with permission by an original work by John Williamson

Read the prompt and passage for Question 2 (page 3), found at the link below:

[https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/apc/ap10\\_frq\\_eng\\_lit\\_formb.pdf](https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/apc/ap10_frq_eng_lit_formb.pdf)

Once you have read the piece, record your answer the *Conquer Question* based on the text. What this means is that your answer will only include the elements in the story. Try to notice complexities.

**Complex Answer in Text:**

Once you have recorded your answer to the **Conquer Question**, identify the 2-3 key universal ideas<sup>2</sup> that the reading explores. Try to notice complexities.

## Answers Below

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<sup>2</sup> There is a list of universal ideas at the end of this packet.

**Answers:**

Use the prompt for Question 2 (page 3), found at the link below:

[https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/apc/ap10\\_frq\\_eng\\_lit\\_formb.pdf](https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/apc/ap10_frq_eng_lit_formb.pdf)

TAG	Exposition from the prompt	C and C	Conquer Answer
T: "Cherry Bomb"	Adult is remembering childhood	Command:  Analyze...World	In text:  Full of youthful adventures and innocent misunderstandings
A: Maxine Clair	Memories are from Fifth-grade summer	Conquer Question(s):  What is the narrator's characterization of her memories?	Universal Ideas: <b>Maturation</b> <b>Comfort</b> <b>Nostalgia</b>
G: Short Story			

Once you have read the piece, record your answer the *Conquer Question* based on the text. What this means is that your answer will only include the elements in the story. Try to notice complexities.

**Complex Answer in Text:**

The narrator remembers her summer being full of blissful and naïve, though sometimes potentially dangerous, adventures.

Once you have recorded your answer to the **Conquer Question**, identify the 2-3 key universal ideas<sup>3</sup> that the reading explores. Try to notice complexities.

Comfort      Sentimentality      Nostalgia      Joviality      Naivety      Adventure  
Youthful Misunderstanding      Blissful Ignorance      Immaturity      Secrecy

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<sup>3</sup> There is a list of universal ideas at the end of this packet.