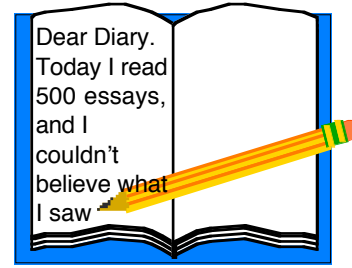


Confessions of an English 12 Marker



All true stories!

Don't tell your parents!

There are some things you should know:

1. Markers try very hard to be objective and mark according to the criteria. They are "tested" each day on sample papers to make sure they recognize the differences between the levels. Also, each paper is marked twice and then checked once by the vice-chair.
2. Most papers fall between the levels; that's where things gets tricky.
3. Exams are marked by three separate teams (Poetry, Literary Essay, Original Composition). In each team, there are about 30 markers who work in pairs. Each pair takes a batch of 30 papers and splits them in half. I mark 15 and record the scores on a piece of paper. Then I switch exams with my partner and put the scores directly on the exams. Finally, we trade score sheets and apply each others scores to the exam booklets. We add the two scores, double it again and put the final mark on the front of the booklet. When we are finished a batch, we take it to the vice-chair and get another one.
4. We only discuss papers on which we have disagreed by more than one level. So if I give an essay a 4 and my partner gives it a 5 it probably gets an 18/24 without any discussion. However, we do use symbols to remind ourselves or hint to our partners if we think a paper is borderline. If I indicate that I think a paper is a 4+ and my partner thinks it's a 5-, we will probably talk and may decide it's a low 5, but still a 5. (This is where, I think, students might really lose out - some partners rarely talked)
5. Markers really do really do understand that this writing is a first draft and that students are under pressure.
6. At the end of the marking, decisions are made about how easy or difficult the exam was, and final grades are scaled accordingly.

A marker's advice to students

Here are some things that impress markers.

- showing a plan
- writing a thesis statement
- giving evidence to support that thesis
- including introductory and concluding paragraphs - a conclusion is not a repetition your intro.
- sticking to the topic
- using sophisticated, mature language to describe characters, etc.
- using correct spelling and punctuation
- making an effort to proofread
- attempting metaphor, simile or other figurative language
- writing original narrative essays - appropriate personal experiences that relate to the prompt
- using humour, suspense, surprise

When one is marking up to 500 essays a day there are some things that can become extremely annoying.

DON'T

- write with anything other than blue or black ink (silver gel pens - Argh! ! ! ! !)
- NO PENCIL!
- use a black felt pen - smudgy and harder to read than ink
- print every word in capital letters
- use circles to dot i's (or smiley faces or hearts)
- write sucky notes, apologies, excuses or threats to the marker
- identify your school, teacher, town or even district.
- swear, use words like "crap", symbols for swear words, slang, etc.
- stray off topic with personal anecdotes
- make reference to other works of literature that you studied in English unless there is a COMPELLING reason to do so. Same goes for memorizing quotes and plonking them in.
- retell the story in your essay - a common mistake
- ignore the recommended number of words - if it's too brief it drops a level, regardless of your succinct brilliance
- plagiarize a short story from your text book - markers know them all
- write and memorize an essay and "massage" it to fit the topic
- get an essay off the internet/a friend/ wherever then memorize and "massage" it to fit the topic

I hope these are helpful tidbits. Good luck on your exam.