

Matric Literature – some vital reminders. 10 Golden rules

- 1. PLAN YOUR ESSAY. This plan MUST be included with your written essay, OTHERWISE YOUR MARK CANNOT EXCEED 60% - Standard Rule**
- 2. A literature answer** is like presenting evidence in a court case: argue your point and present supporting evidence, **by QUOTING or referring closely to the text: STICK CLOSE TO THE TEXT.** When in doubt, use the words of the text. (This also applies to Poetry: QUOTE to support.) **REMEMBER** you are being asked to explore what SHAKESPEARE is saying in the play about themes - for example, Appearance and Reality. **YOUR OWN OPINIONS on themes - for example, “I think throughout history there have always been ungrateful daughters and arrogant fathers” - is irrelevant** even if true.
- 3. Get the register right: PRESENT TENSE -** *King Lear is both imperious and arrogant from his first entrance at the start of the play;* **FORMAL – no contractions – it’s = it is, USE LITERATURE CRITICISM JARGON** (eg *In The Native Commissioner, Johnson describes ethnic social customs using simple diction and style which captures their African dignity. They keep order and minimize conflict in the tribal context, but their function is unknown and foreign to White Europeans. The ignorance of the dominant White rulers is thus exposed.*) **USE AN IMPERSONAL REGISTER –** *The inability to see through his daughters’ duplicity and flattery stems from Lear’s deep-seated vanity.* **DO NOT answer in a chatty, personal register: your essay must NOT be littered with inappropriate/colloquial diction –** *“Well, I get the impression that Lear, easily sucked-up to as he is, is not what I would call, like, very street-wise!*
- 4. Take a stance in the first paragraph of the literature essay** and get into answering the question immediately. Do not simply repeat or re-word the topic: present a firm opinion on it. **KEEP REFERRING BACK TO THE QUESTION TOPIC. Link paragraphs** with linking words e.g. *As was stated in paragraph 1 ...; Therefore, ...; However, ...* etc; and conclude by referring back to your stance in the first paragraph.
- 5. DO NOT STRAY INTO RE-TELLING THE STORY. English First Language questions are NEVER** about the re-telling of what happened, the plot. Your entry point into any answer is the assumption that your marker has read the play/novel.
- 6. Liberally sprinkle your essay with quotes. Stick close to the text. DO NOT USE LONG QUOTES. Re-phrase and use single words or phrases IN INVERTED COMMAS as part of your answer. Eg** *In King Lear, Kent (disguised as Caius) states that Lear has that in his “countenance” that he (Kent) would like to call “master” and that this bearing is one of “authority”. This helps to explain his loyalty to Lear, whom he “loves”, even though Lear made him “banished Kent”.*
- 7. Avoid unnecessary errors: Spell characters names correctly – Regan (NOT Reagan); Edmond (NOT Edmund); Gloucester, etc.**
- 8. The title of the novel (or play): King Lear (UNDERLINE THE TITLE WHEN YOU WRITE IT – every time!) Call King Lear a PLAY (NOT a film or book). The Native Commissioner (spelled with 2mms and 2 ss’s) is a NOVEL (not a book)**

**9. When asked about imagery or figurative language and figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, personification, USE THE MAGIC FORMULA: Identify the figure of speech and then use *Just as... so also...* Eg Lear says “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is
To have a thankless child”**

In this **metaphor** Lear is comparing a snake’s fang to an ungrateful child, saying the ungrateful child is worse. **Just as** a snake’s fang is capable of inflicting pain and lethal poison, **so also** can an ungrateful child hurt her father, but even more so.

10. Do what you are instructed to do – ie, read the question. *Discuss* = centre and focus on the topic by clarifying it and showing insight into understanding what the writer is saying; *Compare* = similarities and differences; *contrast* means differences; *explain* = make clear, give reasons; *context* = what is happening, where it is happening, before, during and after and name the characters; *tone* = attitude underlying (as in tone of voice) etc ANSWER ALL PARTS OF THE QUESTION – there is often more than one part to a question.