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AP ENGLISH LITERATURE · FREE RESOURCE

Common Errors and How to Fix Them

The mistakes that cost AP English Literature students the most points, drawn from the pitfalls the Chief Reader and scoring commentary describe year after year, each shown in a before-and-after example with the reasoning behind the fix. Read it before your first timed essay, use it as a checklist when you revise, and come back to it whenever a scored essay surprises you.

How Essays Actually Lose Points

The AP Literature essay is scored on three rows: a one-point thesis, a four-point evidence-and-commentary row, and a one-point sophistication row. Almost everyone earns the thesis point; the average on Row C is under 0.1. The real contest is in Row B, and that is where most of the errors below do their damage.

The Chief Reader Reports describe the same patterns each year. A few findings from recent reports:

- Students named techniques (decay imagery, lack of punctuation) but did not explain what specific word choices or punctuation choices *revealed*.
- In Q1 2024, many students missed the turn at “But there the likeness ends,” and few explored how words like “solitary,” “companionless,” and “Alone” differ.
- In Q2, students overlooked irony and humor, ignored secondary characters, and read a verb such as “prodded” one-dimensionally.
- In Q3, evidence was too general, drifted into plot summary, and lost the prompt’s key term (writing about decisions instead of indecision, or “the past” instead of memory).

Each section below gives the error, why it costs points, a before-and-after, and a quick test. The examples are original; where a passage is needed, a short original one is supplied so the fix is visible.

The error map

#	ERROR	ROW IT HURTS	WHERE IT HITS HARDEST
1	Plot summary or paraphrase	B	All three essays, especially Q3
2	Device-hunting	B	Q1 and Q2
3	“The author uses diction”	B	Q1 and Q2
4	Unsupported claims	B	All

#	ERROR	ROW IT HURTS	WHERE IT HITS HARDEST
5	No interpretation after evidence	B	All
6	Ignoring "complex"	A and C	All
7	Misreading the turn	A and B	Q1
8	Prompt restatement as thesis	A	All
9	Tunnel vision on the main character	B	Q2
10	Q3: wrong genre or wrong text	B	Q3
11	Losing the key term	A and B	Q3
12	Quote dumping	B	All
13	Organizing by device	B	Q1 and Q2
14	Mechanics that cost clarity	B (4th point)	All

Error 1: Plot Summary and Paraphrase

What it is. Retelling what happens or restating what the text says in plainer words.

Why it costs points. Row B at the 1-point level is described as "summary and description" rather than analysis. Your reader has read the passage. They want to know what the passage *does*.

Before (poem about a speaker watching a heron at dusk):

In the first stanza the speaker sees a heron standing in the water. In the second stanza the heron flies away. In the third stanza the speaker goes home. The poem is about nature and loss.

Why it fails. Every sentence is "and then." No claim, no word-level evidence, and "nature and loss" is a topic.

After:

The speaker's attention to the heron's stillness in the first stanza slows the poem to a watcher's pace, so that the bird's departure in the second registers as an interruption of the speaker's only comfort. By the last stanza, the speaker's walk home is described in the heron's vocabulary of stillness, showing that the loss has not ended the attention but internalized it.

The fix in one sentence. Replace "then" with "which suggests," "so that," or "because."

Quick test. Delete every sentence in your essay that would still be true of a student who only skimmed the text. What is left is analysis.

Q3 variant. Plot summary is the most common Q3 failure because students want to prove they have read the book. Use plot only as the minimum needed to locate your evidence.

SUMMARY (WEAK)	ANALYSIS (STRONG)
"Then Pip goes to London and becomes a gentleman and forgets Joe."	"Pip's move to London turns his gratitude into embarrassment: the narrative voice dwells on the polish of his new boots while Joe's forge shrinks in his memory, showing that his expectations have been purchased with loyalty."

Error 2: Device-Hunting

What it is. Scanning for similes, alliteration, and personification, naming them, and moving on. Teachers call it "hunt and peck" and it is the classic way to write a 2.

Why it costs points. Naming a device is not explaining how it contributes to meaning. Row B points at 3 and 4 depend on explaining how elements contribute to meaning, and the Chief Reader states that elements are often "identified but not explained."

Before:

The poem uses a simile in line 2, a metaphor in line 5, and alliteration in line 8. These devices help the reader picture the scene and make the poem more interesting.

Why it fails. "Help the reader picture the scene" would be true of any poem. No device is tied to the speaker's attitude or to the prompt.

After:

The simile in line 2, which compares the evening sky to "a bruise just beginning to yellow," frames the dusk as an injury in the process of healing rather than as an ending, and the speaker's attention to the bruise's color signals an attitude of careful watching rather than despair. The soft repetition of s in "slow, settling silence" in line 8 extends that care into sound, so that the language itself seems to lower its voice.

What changed. Each device is tied to a specific word, to an interpretation of the speaker's attitude, and to the prompt.

The three questions that fix device-hunting.

1. What exactly does this device compare, sound like, or emphasize?
2. What does that do to my sense of the speaker or character?
3. How does that connect to the prompt's key idea?

Quick test. Circle every device name in your draft. Next to each, there should be at least two sentences that never use the device's name.

Error 3: "The Author Uses Diction"

What it is. Treating "diction," "syntax," "imagery," or "tone" as if naming the category were an observation.

Why it costs points. “Diction” means word choice. Saying “the author uses diction” is like saying “the author uses words.” The observation must name *which* words and *what* they suggest.

Before:

The author uses diction and syntax to show the narrator’s feelings.

After:

The narrator’s verbs (“shuffled,” “drifted,” “waited”) are verbs of passage rather than purpose, and the short sentences that carry them hold no subordinate clauses to organize them; together they portray a man whose days are made of things happening to him.

Words to avoid as bare nouns. “Diction,” “syntax,” “imagery,” “tone,” “language,” “style,” “devices.” Use them only when followed by a specific description:

INSTEAD OF	WRITE
“the diction”	“the plain, monosyllabic words,” “the clipped Anglo-Saxon verbs,” “the elevated, Latinate vocabulary”
“the syntax”	“the long, subordinated sentences,” “the abrupt fragments,” “the sentence that delays its verb”
“the imagery”	“the images of rust and rain,” “the recurring pictures of doors left open”
“the tone”	“a wry, quietly affectionate tone,” “an increasingly strained courtesy”

Error 4: Unsupported Claims

What it is. Making a claim with no textual evidence, or with evidence so general that it could apply anywhere.

Why it costs points. Row B requires “specific evidence” that supports *all* claims. A claim without evidence is an opinion.

Before:

The speaker is lonely. This is shown throughout the poem and makes the reader feel sorry for her.

After:

The speaker’s loneliness is registered in her pronouns: she says “we” only once, in the memory of the first stanza, and every present-tense sentence afterward begins with “I.” The grammatical withdrawal from “we” to “I” makes her isolation a fact of syntax, not just a statement of feeling.

How to repair a claim.

1. Find the smallest piece of the text that supports it (a word, a phrase, a punctuation mark).
2. Quote or paraphrase that specifically.
3. Explain why that evidence supports this claim.

Q3 variant. Evidence for Q3 can be paraphrased scenes, but they must be specific. "In one scene" is not specific; "when Hester stands on the scaffold with the baby in her arms and refuses to name the father" is.

Quick test. Under each topic sentence, can you point to at least two precise places in the text? If not, either find them or change the claim.

Error 5: Evidence Without Interpretation

What it is. Dropping a quotation and moving on, or following a quotation with a restatement ("This shows that...") that does not go beyond the quoted words.

Why it costs points. The CED defines commentary as "explaining relationships among textual evidence, the line of reasoning, and the thesis." A quotation without explanation is only a piece of evidence.

Before:

The narrator describes the house as "silent and still." This shows that the house is silent and still.

After:

The narrator describes the house as "silent and still," a pairing that repeats itself the way a held breath does; the redundancy suggests a household afraid to disturb something, and the reader begins to sense the silence as chosen rather than natural.

Three layers of commentary.

LAYER	QUESTION	EXAMPLE
What	What does the language literally do?	The adjectives repeat the same idea.
How	How does it do it?	Redundancy mimics a held breath.
So what	Why does it matter to the thesis?	The silence is chosen, which supports the claim that the family is hiding something.

A good body paragraph includes all three layers for each key piece of evidence.

The 1:2 rule. Aim for about twice as many sentences of commentary as sentences of evidence. If your paragraph has one quote, you need at least two sentences explaining it.

Error 6: Ignoring the Word “Complex”

What it is. Writing a thesis and essay that give one simple attitude (“the speaker is nostalgic”) when the prompt asks for a *complex* one.

Why it costs points. Every post-2019 Q1 and Q2 prompt uses the word. A single flat attitude cannot be defended as complex, and Row C (sophistication) specifically rewards exploring “complexities or tensions.”

Before:

The speaker is nostalgic about her childhood home. She remembers the kitchen, the garden, and the porch fondly.

After:

The speaker is nostalgic for her childhood home, but the affection is double-edged: she remembers the kitchen as warm and the porch as safe, yet every remembered room is described by what it kept out, so that nostalgia carries with it the memory of a childhood spent being protected from the world.

Where complexity usually lives.

SOURCE	QUESTION TO ASK
Mixed feelings	Is the speaker both drawn and repelled?
A gap	Does what is said differ from what is shown?
A shift	Does the attitude change, or complicate itself, midway?
Irony	Does the narrator see what the character cannot?
A cost	Does the thing admired also harm?
Ambiguity	Could a key word be read two ways?

A note on the word. Do not write “complex” as a substitute for describing the complexity. “The speaker has a complex attitude” says nothing. Say what the two sides are.

Error 7: Misreading the Turn

What it is. Missing the shift in a poem or passage, or treating a text as one continuous attitude when it changes.

Why it costs points. The Chief Reader noted in 2024 that many students “missed the turn” at “But there the likeness ends.” A missed shift usually means a thesis that fits only half of the text, which makes it indefensible and weakens every body paragraph.

Signals of a turn.

SIGNAL	EXAMPLE
A conjunction	but, yet, still, however, though

SIGNAL	EXAMPLE
A time word	now, then, once, suddenly
A stanza or paragraph break	The change often falls exactly at the break
A change in addressee	From "you" to "I," or from a person to an object
A change in tense	Past to present
A change in image	From natural to mechanical, or small to large
A change in syntax	Long to short sentences, or the reverse
Punctuation	A dash, a question, a sudden full stop

Before (a sonnet whose octave describes a quiet town and whose sestet reveals the speaker is leaving it):

The poem describes the quiet town and the speaker's love of it, using imagery of calm streets and warm houses to show her affection.

After:

The octave builds the town as a place of calm streets and warm houses, but the sestet's "yet" redirects the speaker's gaze outward, so that the affection of the first eight lines becomes the very thing she must break away from.

How to find a turn.

1. Mark every place where the tone, topic, or tense changes.
2. Ask what the "before" thought is and what the "after" thought is.
3. Build your thesis around the relationship between them: "The poem moves from ___ to ; **this shift reveals** ."

Prose version. In prose the turn may be a paragraph break where the narrator moves from description to judgment, or a single sentence where the tone sours. Mark it the same way.

Error 8: Prompt Restatement as Thesis

What it is. A thesis that repeats the prompt's language and says nothing new.

Why it costs points. Row A requires a "defensible interpretation." A restatement of the prompt, a device list, or a topic description does not earn the point.

PROMPT	WEAK THESIS	STRONG THESIS
"Analyze how the poet conveys the speaker's complex response to the seasons."	"The poet conveys the speaker's complex response to the seasons."	"The speaker welcomes autumn's color as an artist and dreads it as a mourner, and the poem lets neither response cancel the other."

PROMPT	WEAK THESIS	STRONG THESIS
"Analyze how the author portrays Thomas's complex experience."	"The author portrays Thomas's complex experience through many techniques."	"Thomas experiences success as a form of exile: his achievements carry him farther from the people who would have celebrated them."

Test. Cover the prompt and read your thesis. Does it tell the reader something they could not have guessed from the prompt? If not, it is a restatement.

Error 9: Tunnel Vision on the Main Character

What it is. Analyzing only the protagonist and ignoring secondary characters, the narrator, the setting, the title, and structure.

Why it costs points. The Chief Reader's 2025 report noted that students relied on details about the main figure and ignored other characters; one secondary character was "largely overlooked." Secondary characters often reveal the protagonist by contrast, by reaction, or by what they know.

Before (a Q2 passage in which a young man, Daniel, visits his old teacher, Miss Kerr, who has gone quiet):

Daniel is nervous and he feels guilty about leaving. He keeps looking at the floor and says he is sorry. This shows how bad he feels.

After:

Daniel's apologies are measured against Miss Kerr's silence, which the narrator renders in a single clause: "She poured the tea." Her refusal to forgive or condemn leaves Daniel to fill the quiet with excuses, so that his guilt grows by what is withheld rather than by what is said.

Checklist: who else is in the text?

- Who else speaks, and what do they not say?
- How do they react to the main character?
- Does a minor character see what the protagonist cannot?
- Does the narrator's attitude differ from the protagonist's?
- Does the setting do the work of a character?

Notice, Focus, Interpret. The Chief Reader recommends a simple routine: *Notice* a wide net of details across the whole passage (including all characters), *Focus* on the few that cluster around the prompt's key term, and *Interpret* how they shape the portrayal.

Error 10: Q3 Wrong Genre or Wrong Text

What it is. Choosing a work that does not fit the prompt, is not a work of fiction of literary merit, or that you do not know well enough to cite specifically.

Why it costs points. Q3 asks for “a work of fiction” (drama counts) and an interpretation of the work as a whole. A half-remembered book produces vague evidence and plot summary. A work outside the genre invites a misfit or leaves the reader unconvinced.

PROBLEM	EXAMPLE	FIX
Half-remembered text	Choosing a book you read two years ago	Choose one of your 3 or 4 prepared works
Poor fit with the concept	Forcing a book into a prompt about indecision when the protagonist is decisive	Brainstorm for 3 to 5 minutes before choosing; list candidates and the specific scenes each offers
Works of questionable merit	A genre franchise or a film	Choose from the prompt’s suggested list or a canonical text
A poem, essay, or memoir	Writing about nonfiction	Q3 requires a work of fiction (novel, short story, or play)
Using only the first half of the book	Evidence from the opening chapters only	Cover the beginning, middle, and end; Q3 is about the work as a whole

Prepare 3 or 4 works in advance, ideally one 19th-century novel, one 20th- or 21st-century novel, and one play or non-Western or contemporary work. For each, build a “mental map”:

ELEMENT	WHAT TO KNOW
Three or four key scenes	With concrete details, not just plot
Two or three motifs or images	And what they accumulate to mean
One central interpretive claim	Which you can bend toward different prompts
A few short phrases	You can quote or paraphrase accurately

The College Board’s suggested list on each Q3 prompt shows the kind of work that fits. Past lists include canonical titles (for example *Jane Eyre*, *Beloved*, *Frankenstein*, *A Raisin in the Sun*) and contemporary titles. You may choose any work of literary merit, but starting with the list can save time.

Error 11: Losing the Key Term

What it is. Drifting away from the specific term in the prompt, such as writing about “decisions” when asked about “indecision,” or about “trauma” when asked about “memory.”

Why it costs points. The thesis and the commentary must address the prompt’s concept. The Chief Reader noted that students “lost focus on the key term over the course of the essay” and some “misread the prompt.”

Before (prompt on a character significantly affected by a memory):

Sethe experiences many difficult things in the novel. She has been through slavery, which is terrible, and she must live with it. The book shows how slavery affected her life.

After:

Sethe's memory is not a record but an occupant: it returns uninvited, takes over her sentences, and rearranges the house around it. By treating memory as something that acts, Morrison makes Sethe's present a place where the past is still occurring.

How to hold the key term.

1. Write the key term at the top of your page.
2. Define it for this text in one sentence ("In this novel, memory is ____").
3. Reuse the term (or a close variant) in every topic sentence.
4. End each paragraph by asking "how does this show my term at work?"

Check against the prompt's second sentence. Q3 prompts end with "analyze how [concept] contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole." If your paragraphs describe the concept but never say what it contributes, you are missing half the task.

Error 12: Quote Dumping

What it is. Long quotations pasted into the essay with little or no commentary, or quotations that begin or end paragraphs.

Why it costs points. Long quotes eat time, rarely focus on the language that matters, and suggest that the writer is hoping the quotation will speak for itself. Teachers usually recommend keeping quotations to about seven words.

Before:

Near the end of the poem, the speaker says, "I walked down the long road past the church and the empty fields and the school where the children used to play, and I did not look back at all." This is important because it shows the speaker leaving.

After:

Near the end, the speaker walks past the church, the fields, and the school "and did not look back," a phrase whose flat grammar mimics the discipline of the act. The refusal is stated twice in different words ("did not look back at all"), which suggests that she is persuading herself.

Quote-integration formula.

1. Short fragment (2 to 7 words).

2. Embedded in your own sentence.
3. Followed by two sentences that analyze specific words.

For poetry, cite lines with slashes and line numbers; for prose, use brief phrases and parenthetical page or line numbers if the passage provides them. (See the companion *Thesis, Commentary, and Quote Integration Templates* document for models.)

Error 13: Organizing by Device

What it is. Paragraph 1 is imagery, paragraph 2 is diction, paragraph 3 is syntax, with each paragraph covering the whole text.

Why it costs points. Device-by-device organization makes each paragraph a catalogue and prevents a line of reasoning. Readers cannot tell how the paragraphs build on each other.

Before (outline):

1. Intro with thesis
2. Imagery
3. Diction
4. Syntax
5. Conclusion

After (outline organized by idea):

1. Intro with thesis ("The speaker's praise masks resentment...")
2. The surface: how the opening lines build admiration (using diction and imagery together)
3. The crack: how a shift in syntax and a single ironic word expose resentment
4. The resolution: how the final image holds both feelings
5. Conclusion

Why idea-based organization works. It lets each paragraph advance the argument: surface, complication, resolution. Techniques appear as evidence inside each idea, which also lets you show several techniques working together, the standard for the fourth point of Row B.

Error 14: Mechanics That Cost Clarity

What it is. Grammar, punctuation, and usage errors that interfere with a reader's ability to follow your argument.

Why it costs points. The rubric states that writing with errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point of Row B. Perfect prose is not required; clarity is.

The errors that matter most

ERROR	BEFORE	AFTER
Comma splice	The speaker is uneasy, the syntax shows it.	The speaker is uneasy; the syntax shows it.
Run-on	The narrator is ironic she mocks the clergyman.	The narrator is ironic: she mocks the clergyman.
Fragment	Showing the speaker's fear.	The final line shows the speaker's fear.
Pronoun without referent	In the poem it says that the speaker leaves.	In the poem, the speaker leaves.
Shifts in tense	The narrator describes the room and then described the stairs.	The narrator describes the room and then describes the stairs.
Vague "this"	This shows her fear.	This hesitation shows her fear.
its / it's	The poem shows it's shape in the last stanza.	The poem shows its shape in the last stanza.
affect / effect	The imagery effects the mood.	The imagery affects the mood.
Apostrophe for plural	The poem's use many image's.	The poem uses many images.
Titles	Title of a poem in italics	Put poem and short-story titles in quotation marks; put novel, play, and book titles in italics or underline them
Contractions	It doesn't show that...	It does not show that... (formal register)
Second person	You can see the speaker's fear.	The reader can see the speaker's fear.
Informal phrasing	The poem is kind of sad.	The poem is subdued, even mournful.
Wrong tense for analysis	The poet showed...	The poet shows...

Present tense for analysis

Use the present tense when discussing literary works: "Austen mocks," "the speaker admits," "the poem ends." Use the past only for events that occurred earlier in the story's own time ("Before the quarrel, they had been close").

Words to retire

These vague words carry little meaning. The "taboo" lists many teachers use include:

RETIRE	USE INSTEAD
thing, stuff	a specific noun
very, really, so	a stronger word

RETIRE	USE INSTEAD
good, bad	a precise adjective
a lot	much, many, frequently
society (unspecified)	name the group or class
relatable	name the shared experience
shows	reveals, exposes, dramatizes
uses	casts, builds, deploys

Sentence variety

Mix long and short sentences. A series of identical sentences ("The poem uses... The poem shows... The poem suggests...") reads as repetitive and may suggest shallow thought. Vary openings: start with a subordinate clause, a prepositional phrase, or the evidence itself.

Repetitive: The speaker is angry. The speaker shows this in line 3. The speaker uses short words.

Varied: In line 3, the speaker's anger arrives in short, hammering words: "No. Not now. Go."

Handwriting and typing

The exam is digital, so you will type your essays in Bluebook. Typing removes handwriting problems but adds others: do not leave the essay as a single block of text; indent or separate paragraphs; and reread for typos that change meaning.

Bonus Pitfalls from the Chief Reader Reports and Teacher Experience

PITFALL	WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
Over-hedging ("perhaps," "maybe," "might possibly")	Choose one calibrated hedge per claim, such as "suggests" or "can be read as"
Spending the whole 40 minutes on the introduction	Write a two- or three-sentence intro and move to the evidence
Writing a long conclusion at the expense of a fourth body paragraph	A body paragraph with evidence is worth more than a summary conclusion
Contextualizing through sweeping generalizations ("Throughout history...")	Use a specific historical or literary context that illuminates the reading
Ignoring contradictory details	Address the detail that complicates your thesis; it is often where complexity lives

PITFALL	WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
Ornate vocabulary that hides the idea	Choose plain, precise words and put the sophistication in the argument
Inventing your own metaphors that distract from the author's	Analyze the author's figures
Polishing instead of finishing	Readers expect timed drafts. Cross-outs and uneven conclusions are acceptable; blank pages are not
Leaving an essay blank	A thesis and one developed paragraph can earn points; always write something

A Revision Checklist

Use this after each practice essay. Check each item honestly.

Thesis (Row A) - ☐ It makes a claim about the meaning of the text, not just the topic. - ☐ It goes beyond restating the prompt. - ☐ It names the specific attitude, experience, or portrayal, and its complexity.

Evidence and commentary (Row B) - ☐ Every claim is supported by specific evidence (a word, phrase, or concrete moment). - ☐ Evidence is drawn from across the text, not just one part. - ☐ Each piece of evidence is followed by at least two sentences of commentary. - ☐ Commentary explains *how* the language works and *why* it matters to the thesis. - ☐ Several techniques are shown working together (Q1 and Q2). - ☐ The essay has a line of reasoning: paragraphs build on each other. - ☐ Q3: the key term appears in every paragraph, and the essay addresses the work as a whole. - ☐ Sentences are clear and free of errors that interfere with meaning.

Sophistication (Row C) - ☐ The essay explores a tension, complication, or alternative reading, throughout. - ☐ Any context is specific and illuminating, not a generalization. - ☐ The style is precise and vivid, not ornate.

Self-scoring. Score each row honestly, then compare to the rubric: Row A 0-1, Row B 0-4, Row C 0-1. Write down the one error that cost you the most points and work on it in your next essay.

Practice: Diagnose and Repair

Each item contains a short weak response to an original poem or passage. Identify the main error (use the numbers in the error map) and write a repair. A sample key follows.

The poem for items 1 to 4 (original).

Inventory The blinds are drawn. The chart is on its hook. The water jug is full. The clock is slow. I count the things that I am not to touch, and fold my coat, and unfold it, and go to stand beside the window, where the snow is making of the car park a white page. I do not look at you. I do not look.

Item 1.

The speaker is in a room with a person who is sick. She lists things in the room. She goes to the window and sees snow. The poem is about being sad.

Item 2.

The poem uses a metaphor ("a white page"), repetition ("I do not look"), and a list. These devices make the poem more interesting and show the speaker's feelings.

Item 3.

The speaker is very controlled. This is shown when she says, "I do not look at you. I do not look." This shows that she does not look.

Item 4.

The poet uses imagery and diction to show the speaker's complex feelings about the situation.

Item 5 (prose, original). Passage: *Mrs. Harrow poured the tea and said nothing of the will. Her son, who had come twelve miles in the rain to hear it, drank his in small, polite swallows.* Weak response: "Mrs. Harrow is sad and her son is nervous. The author uses sentences to show they are tense."

Item 6 (Q3). Prompt: "a character significantly affected by a memory." Weak response: "In *Jane Eyre*, Jane has many experiences as a child and then goes to Thornfield, where she falls in love. Then she leaves and later returns."

Answer Key

Item 1. Error 1 (plot summary and topic). Sample repair: "The speaker's inventory of the room reads as composure, but the order of the list (blinds, chair, jug, clock) ends on the one item that moves, so that her composure is revealed as a way of counting down to what she will not look at."

Item 2. Error 2 (device-hunting). Sample repair: "The metaphor of the car park as 'a white page' turns the snow into a space where nothing has been written yet, which lets the speaker imagine a future she cannot yet enter. The second 'I do not look' drops its object, so the denial seems to falter at the moment it becomes absolute."

Item 3. Error 5 (evidence without interpretation), with Error 6 (flat attitude). Sample repair: "The speaker's repeated refusal, 'I do not look at you. I do not look,' tightens in the second sentence by dropping its object, as though even naming the person were too much to bear. The control that seemed to hold the poem together is thus the form her grief takes, and the sentence that is meant to deny feeling becomes the poem's loudest admission of it."

Item 4. Errors 3 and 8 (bare category and prompt restatement). Sample repair: "Although the speaker's list-making and folding of her coat seem like composure, the shrinking syntax of the final line shows that control and grief are the same act, so that her inventory of the room is also an inventory of what she cannot say."

Item 5. Errors 3 and 9 (bare categories; the son and the mother treated as a single mood). Sample repair: "The narrator gives Mrs. Harrow a single action ('poured the tea') and a silence ('said nothing of the will'), while the son's twelve miles in the rain and his 'small, polite swallows' show a man who has come for an answer and will not insult the house by asking. The scene is comic in its restraint but cruel in its withholding: the tea becomes the means by which the mother keeps power."

Item 6. Errors 1 and 11 (plot summary; the key term, memory, is missing). Sample repair: "In *Jane Eyre*, memory acts on Jane as a pressure rather than a record: the red-room returns in her body whenever she is confined, so that Charlotte Brontë makes Jane's adult defiance at Thornfield a response to a childhood she has never finished remembering."

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