

## **Questions that will Lead you to the “So What” Element of the “Brutus” Prompt**

KEY: Shakespearean tragedies always end with a moment of calm after the storm—usually a speech by the survivors mourning the loss of life or fall from greatness that has taken place before. In this case, Antony praises Brutus and orders for him an honorable burial, which he gives no one else; Brutus is the major preoccupation on Antony’s mind, and he is the last thought in ours as the play ends. WHY??????

-Consider Brutus like a car crash: it’s ugly and we don’t want to look but we can’t help but be fascinated. What is it about his beliefs/values, his character and his actions in the play that draw our curiosity?

**-THINK AS THE AUTHOR: What do you think Shakespeare wanted the reader to feel or believe through this character? What essential themes does this character portray and/or struggle with?**

## **Questions that will Lead you to the “So What” Element of the “Heroes/Villains” Prompt**

-The purpose of analyzing characters in literature is to try to better understand what it means to be a human being. What insight into human nature might your characters offer us?

-First things first: make sure you’ve got your 2-3 characters you’re going to talk about. I suggest finding some character element that can be compared or contrasted between your characters (for example, if you picked something like “vanity”, both Brutus and Caesar apply).

-In Shakespearean tragedies, no one really wins; if you’re lucky you merely survive (and the main characters generally do not). What does that tell you about the sorts of people who inhabit his plays?

Understanding the author’s purpose is essential: why has he deliberately made your characters flawed and questionable?

## Questions that will Lead you to the “So What” Element of the “Persuasion” Prompt

**Essential:** You need an organizing principle. Here’s what I mean: there’s so much persuading going on that if you tried to cover the whole play your paper would quite ironically (and tragically) go on forever without really answering the prompt. So FOCUS! Hone in on specific aspects of the play and use them to discuss the play as a whole.

Two ways of doing that:

**Organize by character:** *Focus on one character throughout the play (Brutus, for example, attempts to argue on moral/ethical grounds)*

**Organize by type:** *Focus on a style of persuasion you see and note how multiple characters use it (flattery seems to be popular)*

-Key Words are WHY and HOW...as in, *why* was your character—or why were your speeches—persuasive (or not), and *how* did persuaders do it? Consider what his or her (don’t forget Portia!) “method” is and what it says about people’s soft spots.

-Do consider: these great, legendary men like Brutus and Caesar, who held themselves to be morally or physically superior to mere mortals, both were swayed by others—and to their doom, no less. What do you think make of that?

## Questions that will Lead you to the “So What” Element of the “Gender” Prompt

-BALANCE! While I understand it’s 2011 and all, I’m not asking for your opinion on the limitation placed on females during Shakespeare’s day—there’s not much he could do about it, and there’s nothing to discuss about it. I’m asking you to analyze what’s actually on the page—unless absence is your focal point—because that is the only thing open to discussion.

-You need to think hard about why Shakespeare sets up the play so that his female roles occur –not only does it tell us a lot about the two wives but it gives us a lot about the men, too.

-Try playing gender red rover: If you put the men on one side (the senate—the public world) and the women on the other (the house—the private), what could you say about these two worlds? Do keep in mind: Portia and Calphurnia are different, but they are also the same, just as Brutus and Caesar are.

-Consider comparing the varying degrees of success Portia and Calphurnia have in trying to persuade their husbands to do what the wives want.

## Questions that will Lead you to the “So What” Element of the “Rhetorical Analysis Prompt”

Essential: In order to develop a good thesis, you need to connect the way the speech is written to what it is trying to accomplish. This can be done one of two ways:

-Evaluation: What makes the speech effective? (or in Brutus’s case, not effective?)

-Analysis: Identify the foremost techniques Brutus/Antony use and what he is trying to accomplish by using them.

-You have a lot of options; don’t try to tackle everything. Focus on what matters—the meaning or success of the speech will probably hinge on a few aspects that seem to be the core. Here’s your list:

### Rhetorical Appeals

Ethos  
Pathos  
Logos

### Rhetorical Devices

Metaphor/simile/personification  
imagery  
diction  
parallelism/anaphora/repetition

The effectiveness of ethos/pathos/logos is 100% connected to the use of rhetorical devices (and vice versa). In order to have a meaty, substantial conversation on paper, you’ll need to connect the columns. For proof, note the huge difference in the methods of Brutus and Antony at the funeral speech! Each makes a very different kind of appeal, and each brings to that appeal a different style.

-Other things that your paper can focus on:

- a) The connection between the words and what they say about the speaker:
- b) How the speech contributes to Shakespeare’s development of key themes in the play,
- c) Again, consider the effectiveness of the speech and why it either succeeded or failed.