

Writing a Literary Essay

I) Ideas! Think of Something Worth Saying (INTERPRET!)

A) **Collect Evidence:** Annotate the text as you read & then list evidence through these reading strategies:

- 1) Read & Re-read
- 2) Use Natural Abilities (find important and confusing lines and discuss them)
- 3) STRP (focus on things that are Surprising, given Too much attention, Repeated, Position)
- 4) Scientific Method (collect evidence, ask questions, hypothesize, focus on problems)
- 5) Connect to Self, Texts, World
- 6) Look closely at character, plot, setting, tone/voice, and figurative language
- 7) Look at text from different angles through Literary Criticism (New, Psycho, Feminist, etc.)
- 8) Discuss in Group



B) **Find Patterns in the Evidence:** Free write, create cluster maps, or circle/group evidence

- 1) Remember that ALL literary essays ask you to prove a theme with evidence:
 - (a) What idea/view of life is the author trying to sell you in the story? (Theme)
 - (b) Theme = 1-2 Word Big Idea/Topic (love, redemption, etc) + Multiple pieces of Evidence
- 2) Gather evidence that corresponds with your type of essay
 - (a) Circle Important Evidence on Text
 - (b) List out direct quotes & paraphrase/summarize (with page numbers)
 - (c) Try to group multiple pieces of evidence into 1-2 word categories.
 - (d) If you can't figure out the patterns do some:
 - (i) Free Writing /Recursive writing
 - (ii) Go back and read/watch key parts
- 3) Consider how your evidence might fit the most typical types of literary essays:
 - (a) New Criticism: How did the author put the story together to create meaning (plot, P.O.V., tone, figurative language, character, dialogue, etc).
 - (i) How do we learn through Indirect Characterization
 - (ii) What are the External & Internal Conflicts? How are they resolved?
 - (iii) How does the text illustrate a theme through a dynamic (changing) character(s)?
 - (b) Other Types of Literary Essays:
 - (i) Reader Response/Compare & Contrast: How can we better understand this story by comparing it to another story, an historical event, a different discipline, or pop culture?
 - (ii) Other Literary Criticism:
 - (A) Psychological, Historical, Biographical
 - (B) Feminist, Marxist, Reader-Response, Archetypal, and more.

C) **Focus & Clarify your Interpretation**

- 1) Write a tentative Thesis
 - (a) A **thesis statement** in a literary essay is a sentence(s) that explicitly identifies your opinion, which is almost always to persuade your audience that your theme is supported by the text.
 - (b) Be sure that your thesis statement is:
 - (i) Debatable: An opinion, rather than a fact (can/would someone disagree?)
 - (ii) Insightful: It should make the reader say, "huh!" "wow!" or "no way!"
 - (iii) Specific: "Odysseus becomes a man" is not as good as "Odysseus teaches Greeks how to be a man by learning to control his anger and keep it in his pants."
- 2) Reassess Evidence
 - (a) Go back and look for more evidence
 - (b) Look for evidence that doesn't fit your interpretation & change your thesis so it does fit.
- 3) Write an Improved Thesis

II) Organize Your Interpretation

A) Break Down or Build Up your Thesis

- 1) Break Down
 - (a) What separate things do you need to prove in order to prove your Thesis?
 - (b) If “A” is true and “B” is true then my Thesis is true.
- 2) Build Up (*use if thesis is still weak- not specific, interesting, & debatable*)
 - (a) Group your list of evidence into larger categories
 - (i) This all proves... “A” This and this proves “B”
 - (ii) This isn’t that important so I won’t use it
 - (b) Create a cluster map (pyramid shaped)



B) Change Thesis (probably necessary here)

C) Write an Outline

- 1) Create a Cluster Map (pyramid shaped/or at least each circle into 2 parts)
- 2) Write Your Thesis ABOVE your Outline
- 3) Follow Basic Outline Procedures (as explained before)
- 4) Prove Your Point (the Body of your essay)
 - (a) Make Claims (“I think...”)
 - (b) Provide Evidence (“For example...”)
 - (i) Direct quotes
 - (ii) Summaries
 - (iii) Consider other methods of proving things with Logos:
 - (A) Metaphors/Similes & Analogies
 - (B) Expert Opinion
 - (iv) Consider using Pathos & Ethos:
 - (A) Consider Audience (Ethos)
 1. Write like they expect
 2. Write what they want
 3. Respond to objections: (“Some might say..., but actually...”)
 - a. What would someone who disagrees with you say? Why are they wrong?
 - b. The audience trusts you if they think you are being fair and balanced
 - (B) Story Evidence (Ethos & Pathos)
 1. Personal Stories
 - a. Short
 - b. Salient (they directly apply to your point)
 - c. Powerful
 2. Illustrations/Examples of Others
 - (c) Explanations (“This proves my point because...”)
 - (i) Be very clear because your audience can’t ask questions to clarify
 - (ii) Be sure that your explanations prove the claim in that paragraph and ultimately tie back into the thesis.

III) Write Your Essay

A) Rough Draft

- 1) Consider different forms (if unsure, go with 5 Paragraph Theme)
 - (a) 5 Paragraph Theme
 - (b) European Model (Question, then withhold thesis until the end).
 - (c) Metaphor/Story/Analogy Centered
 - (d) "They Say, I Say" Format (Point, Counterpoint)
 - (e) Cicero's Canons Structure
 - (f) Monroe's Motivated Sequence
- 2) Write the BODY of your essay first (Your Outline in sentence/paragraph form IS the Body)
 - (a) Make a **Claim** or opinion statement (this should directly relate to a part of your thesis)
 - (b) Provide **Evidence** that supports your claim (this will usually be a short quote or summary of events).
 - (c) **Explain** exactly how your evidence supports your claim (be overly clear because your reader can't ask questions).
- 3) Write the Introduction & Conclusion next (These can be *different for different forms*)
 - (a) Basic Introductions
 - (i) Attention Grabber: Quote, Statistic, Startling fact, Anecdote/Story,
 - (ii) Link
 - (iii)(sometimes Background)
 - (iv)(sometimes Build of Credibility)
 - (v) Thesis*
 - (b) Basic Conclusions
 - (i) Summary of Claims with Evidence
 - (ii) The So What- why it matters
 - (iii)Clincher- ends the paper

B) REVISE (Change BIG Things- "The Plastic Surgery")

- 1) Reconsider your IDEAS: Do you have strong arguments?
 - (a) Backed by Evidence? Quotes? Examples? Metaphors/Illustrations?
 - (b) Interesting Thesis? Who cares? Is it arguable? Could it be more specific?
 - (c) Emotional? Tone: Do you sound like a robot? Can you add Stories?
 - (i) Go Back and Find more evidence in text
 - (ii) Look for expert opinion
 - (iii)Do more recursive/free writing
 - (iv)Discuss with others
- 2) Reconsider your ORGANIZATION (Clear & Concise?)

But I LOVE this paragraph. How can I delete it? It's some of my best writing ever! Ok, maybe it doesn't contribute to the overall story but I spent so long writing it! If single paragraphs could win the Pulitzer, this paragraph would win, for sure. Revision is overrated, especially since I spent so much time on this paragraph. Why do I have to get rid of something that I can't make more words? This paragraph is the best I've ever written and I



D. Shi

Types of Literary Analysis Essays

1. **Theme Analysis**- Deciding on the author's overarching theme and proving it with evidence from the text.
2. **Character Analysis**- A discussion of one or more characters in the novel looking specifically at how the author creates a dynamic (changing) character through indirect characterization.
3. **Analytical Essay**- Looking at how the author put together the story to create meaning. Focusing on things like plot, setting, tone/voice, figurative language, point of view, character, and dialogue.
4. **Compare and Contrast Essay**- Taking a story and revealing its meaning by noting similarities and differences with another story, an historical event, a different discipline (like physics), or something in popular culture.
5. **Lens Essay**- Taking a certain perspective with regards to literary criticism (Marxist, Feminist, Reader-Response, etc.) and using that as the basis of analysis.
6. **Historical Context Essay**- Researching the time in which the story was written and using that as a basis for understanding the story.
7. **Author Centric Essay**- Researching the author's life and using that as a basis for understanding the story.

I. Introduction:

- A. Attention Grabber:
- B. Link (Title and Author Name):
- C. Thesis:

II. Body:

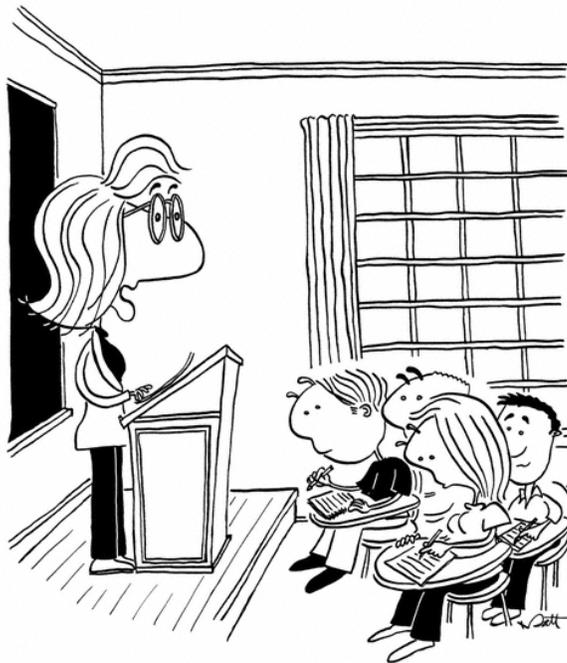
- A. Claim 1:
- B. Evidence 1:
- C. Explanation 1:

- D. Claim 2:
- E. Evidence 2:
- F. Explanation 2:

- G. Claim 3
- H. Evidence 3:
- I. Explanation 3:

III. Conclusion:

- A. Final Summary:
- B. Closing Statement



"When writing your essays, I encourage you to think for yourselves while you express what I'd most agree with."

Examples of the Different Types of Literary Analysis

1. Theme Analysis Essay

In the story "A&P," by John Updike, the main character Sammy makes the leap from an adolescent, knowing little more about life than what he has learned working at the local grocery store, into a man prepared for the rough road that lies ahead. As the story begins, Sammy is nineteen and has no real grasp for the fact that he is about to be living on his own working to support himself. Throughout the course of the story, he changes with a definite step into, first, a young man realizing that he must get out of the hole he is in and further into a man, who has a grasp on reality looking forward to starting his own family.

In the beginning, Sammy is but a youth growing up learning what he knows about life in small town grocery store. His role models include, Stokesie, the twenty-two year-old, supporting a family doing the same job Sammy does yet aspiring to one day have the manager's position, and Lengel, the store manager who most certainly started out in the sa...

2. Character Analysis Essay:

Sammy, in A&P by John Updike, plays a cashier at A&P grocery store. Sammy lives in a small country town in New England. He must be a college or high school student because he still lives with his parents. Sammy is quite intelligent and creative in the way he describes three girls that are dressed in bathing suits. Sammy is at work when they catch his eye. He is mesmerized by them and creatively names all of them by the way they walk and their movements in the store. Sammy's character seems to observe people judgmentally but he would never speak aloud to them about it to the people he was sizing-up in his mind. Sammy could have been not such a popular guy in high school. He sounds, by the way he talks, that he was a cocky loser with no friends when he was growing up in that small country town. Even though Sammy criticizes the way the girls walk and their supposed character in his mind he wou...

3. Analytical Essay

The setting and the point of view of a story are both very important tools used to convey an author's meaning. This can be demonstrated by the fact that if one or both of these characteristics are changed, the story's content and meaning can be altered beyond recognition. In particular, neither the setting nor the point of view in John Updike's "A&P" could be changed without losing the meaning of the story or without having the same effect on the reader.

For example, in "A&P", John Updike places us in the familiar surroundings of a grocery store. This setting is very important to the story because many people have worked in similar settings, and are familiar with the redundancy of the work on a daily basis. Nothing seems to change in the store, and as a result, any variation from the normal routine is quickly noticed and often welcomed by employees. Sammy, a grocery store cashier at the A & P, sees his surroundings as being mundane and non-inter...

4. Compare and Contrast Essay

In the three stories To Build a Fire, The Use of Force, and A and P there are some different conflicts. A conflict is struggle between two or more objects. In these stories the three different conflicts are man versus nature, man versus man, and man versus self. The three stories that contain these conflicts are To Build a Fire by Jack London, The Use of Force by Williams Carlos Williams, and A and P by John Updike. The first story to talk about is To Build a Fire, then The Use of Force, and lastly A and P. The story To Build a Fire by London has one of the most unpredictable conflicts in it. The conflict in this story is man versus nature. The two forces in the story are the man and the freezing cold. In the story a man is trying to get to his destination and the cold weather is stopping him from making it their. To beat the cold the man tries to forget about being cold, chew tobacco and start a fire to stay warm. The cold does defend it by freezing the to...

5. Historical Context Essay

Because of the diversity of positions associated with existentialism, the term is impossible to define precisely. Certain themes common to virtually all existentialist writers can, however, be identified. The term itself suggests one major theme: the stress on concrete individual existence and, consequently, on subjectivity, individual freedom, and choice. Most philosophers since Plato have held that the highest ethical good is the same for everyone; insofar as one approaches moral perfection, one resembles other morally perfect individuals. The 19th-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who was the first writer to call himself existential, reacted against this tradition by insisting that the highest good for the individual is to find his or her own unique vocation. As he wrote in his jou...

6. Lens Essay

There are days that it would be nice outside and I'll go out for a walk; I'd either go to the park up the block, the Bodega (a Spanish grocery store) at the corner, or a friend's house. I would walk down the sidewalk and it's like I'm a famous person or an expensive car the way guys around me would act, and the thing is that it happens to all women. You get the "looks" by the guy across the street, the "stare" by the men driving by, the "whistles" from the group of guy's sitting on stairs as I walk by, and then there's the occasional "neck-break" when a guy walks by me. All that attention is very uplifting to some and tolerable by most, but when a guy crosses the line and actually speaks his mind, that's when he becomes a sexist pig. In the short story "A&P" by John Updike it's main character Sammy didn't cross the line on being a sexist pig.

From the moment the three girls-"Queenie", "that chunky ...

7. Author Centric Essay

Whether it is novels, short stories or critiques; John Updike gives the reader his analysis on human behavior. He starts with realistic issues and adds a little imagination to create a novel that is rich in quality and relevant to the lifestyles and actions of man (Towers 157). A person's color, gender, and social class all influence and assemble their personality and view on life. Updike expresses this concept in his works and sometimes uses moral dilemmas and discriminations to show the influences. Moral dilemmas are evident in John Updike's novels Brazil and The Coup; related to color gender, and social class.

How to Write an Essay (5-Paragraph Theme)

Title (Write a title that catches the reader's interest & hints at your point)

Introduction: (Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em)

Attention Grabber (Lead): The purpose of the attention grabber is to grab the reader's attention. You will have the reader's full attention when you first begin your paper, so you must start with something that makes the reader want to keep reading. Some good ideas for an attention grabber include: *a quote, a metaphor, a statistic, hypothetical situations, rhetorical questions (questions you do not want an answer to), an anecdote (very short story that is often funny), painting a picture (describe in detail), listing interesting facts, making a comparison, a statement of purpose, etc.* **Link or Background**

Material: After you have the reader's attention, you must transition into the topic of your paper. The background material is the place in which you will tell your reader what your paper is about. *This is a good place for the title and the author's name.* **Thesis (Point):** A Thesis is usually 1 sentence that tells the reader the main point of your paper. It tells the reader everything you will cover (and the exact order in which you will cover it).

Body: (Tell 'em- and Prove It!)

Paragraph 1: **1. Point Sentence:** Each paragraph starts with a main/topic sentence. This sentence is like a mini-thesis that is just for that paragraph. The topic sentence should tell the reader everything that is going to be covered in that paragraph. The main/topic sentence should relate directly to your thesis (I should be able to look at your thesis and see where your main/topic sentence came from). **2. Evidence:** Your main/topic sentence made a claim and now you must "prove" it. One way to prove your main/topic sentence is through short quotes. Take the text directly from the story, movie, etc. Another way to prove your main/topic sentence is to *very briefly* retell part of the story. Be sure to make *your point* the focus and not the story (this is not a book report!) **3. Analysis of Evidence:** Explain in your own words how this quote proves your main/topic sentence. **4. Transitional Sentence:** After you have given several examples and quotes that prove your main/topic sentence it is time to move on to another topic/idea. When you change thoughts (switch from one paragraph to the next) you must tell the reader so that they do not become confused. The last sentence in each paragraph of your body should sum up your main point and connect it to your next point.

Paragraphs 2,3,...: Repeat the pattern shown in Paragraph 1 for as many paragraphs as it takes to fully "prove" your thesis statement. The order of the paragraphs should follow the order set out in the thesis statement (feel free to change the thesis statement at any time).

Written Conclusion: (Tell 'em what you told 'em)

Final Summary: Summarizes the whole paper. Either make a statement that restates the main message or highlights the main points you have made and how they relate to the main message. Answers the question "so what?" **Closing Statement (Clincher):** Tells the reader "the end" without actually saying "the end." Gives the reader something to think about or do. Good closing statements include: *quotes, statistics, anecdotes, metaphors, comparisons, an answer to your rhetorical question, etc.*

Grading of Literary Analysis

Score of 6 (Highest Possible)

I. Complexity of Thought

- Demonstrate Critical Thinking Skills
- Understand complexities involved
- Goes beyond generalities to provide a precise, clear, and interesting point of view.

II. Substantiality of Development

- Clearly articulated point of view
- Examples, evidence, & reasoning fully explained
- Well-organized, logical, smooth
- Each sentence & paragraph builds on the one before

III. Facility with Language

- Rhetorical strategy chosen is purposefully employed
- Diction is precise and efficient
- Sentences vary in length and type



Score of 6: Demonstrates clear and consistent mastery

Effectively and insightfully develops a point of view on the issue and demonstrates outstanding critical thinking, using clearly appropriate examples, reasons, and other evidence to support its position.

Is well organized and clearly focused, demonstrating clear coherence and smooth progression of ideas

Exhibits skillful use of language, using a varied, accurate, and apt vocabulary

Demonstrates meaningful variety in sentence structure

Is free of most errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics