

## Putting Together a Literature Paper

(from *Teaching Composition with Literature*)

Your thesis is your interpretation of the work or some aspect of it. If your instructor gives you a question (How does setting function in "The Storm"?), your thesis should be your answer to that question.

Other frames for creating theses are:

1. (The author) uses   x   to show   y  .
2. Through the use of   x   (the author) shows (how)   y  .
3. The development of   x   reveals   y  .

Examples of how these might be filled in:

1. (Shakespeare) uses the x-plot to show Iago's growing influence over Othello.
2. Through the use of the grotesque, (Faulkner) shows how Miss Emily's secrets represent ugly truths about the American South.
3. The development of the flea as a symbol for love reveals the desperation behind the speaker's attempt to seduce the lady he is addressing.

### Body Paragraphs

After you state your thesis (in an Introduction), you must support your thesis in your body paragraphs. You must cite and explain passages from the work itself that give rise to your interpretation; this is how you support your argument. Remember that you are explaining and interpreting the work and NOT summarizing it (simply retelling what happens). By following the model below, you can create any number of body paragraphs to support your thesis.

#### The Five-Step Paragraph

- |                         |                |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Topic Sentence       | 4. Explanation |
| 2. Narrow Down Sentence | 5. Conclusion  |
| 3. Quotation            |                |

1. In the topic sentence you should present some portion of your thesis to be proven in the paragraph. Using the frames above, you can present information inserted into spaces x and y. Early paragraphs in the essay focus on space x; later paragraphs focus on space y. Each new paragraph should either develop a new portion or expand a point made in a previous paragraph.

- 2. The narrow down sentence should point the reader's attention to a specific passage that supports your topic sentence. You should name the source of the passage (who is speaking here?), name the location of the passage (is it toward the beginning of the work, the end, in what paragraph?), or describe the content of the passage (who's doing what? what is the speaker saying?).
- 3. Quotation. In this sentence you should write out the passage you pointed out in the narrow down sentence. If you write it out word for word it must be in "quotation marks." If you paraphrase (rewrite it in your own words), you don't need quotation marks. However, whether you quote or paraphrase, you need to document your source by giving the last name of the author and the page number on which the passage occurs in the original: (Kennedy 97).
- 4. Explanation. In this sentence you need to explain the meaning of the passage you just quoted, and/or explain how that passage supports your topic sentence. Refer to specific words in the passage that carry special meaning or extra importance and how those words give rise to your interpretation.
- 5. Conclusion. To conclude the body of the paragraph, you need to finish your explanation of the passage and sum up the points just presented. You may also need to provide a transition to the next paragraph.

### Analysis Checklist

Thesis \_\_\_\_\_

Topic Sentence \_\_\_\_\_

Narrow Down (location/speaker/content) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Quote " \_\_\_\_\_ " (reference)

Explanation of quote's key word(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion (relate meaning of quote to topic) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Editing Checklist ~~OR~~ LITERATURE ESSAYS

1. Is the title of my essay at least moderately informative and interesting?
2. Do I identify the subject of my essay (author and title) early?
3. What is my thesis? Do I state it soon enough (perhaps even in the title) and keep it in view?
4. Is the organization reasonable? Does each point lead into the next without irrelevancies and without anticlimaxes?
5. Is each paragraph unified by a topic sentence or a topic idea? Are there adequate transitions from one paragraph to the next?
6. Are generalizations supported by appropriate concrete details, especially by brief quotations from the text?
7. Is the opening paragraph interesting and, by its end, focused on the topic? Is the final paragraph conclusive without being repetitive?
8. Is the tone (writer's attitude toward his/her work) appropriate? No sarcasm, no apologies, no condescension?
9. If there is a summary, is it as brief as possible, given its purpose?
10. Are the quotations adequately introduced, and are they accurate?
11. Is the present tense used to describe the author's work and the action of the work ("Chopin shows, Mrs. Mallard sobs")
12. Have I kept in mind the needs of my audience, for instance by defining unfamiliar terms, or by briefly summarizing works or opinions that the reader may be unfamiliar with?
13. Is documentation provided where necessary?
14. Are the spelling and punctuation correct? Are other mechanical matters (such as margins, spacing, and citations) in correct form? Have I proofread carefully?
15. Is the paper properly identified—author's name, instructor's name, course number and date?

## How to Write an Effective Essay (Barnet, Chap. 3)

1. Prewriting: Read the work carefully; annotate, make notes, RESPOND.
2. Drafting: Find a topic and thesis and get it down on paper. Try making an outline for organization: lesser material to greater (to avoid anticlimax), simple to the complex, move from most obvious to least obvious. Get it down on paper; one word will lead to another. The process of writing will clarify and improve your preliminary ideas.
3. Revising: Allow at least a day before you revise so you have a fresh eye/brain. Pay attention to the title: make one now if you haven't already; make it interesting and information; can contain thesis; should keep you focused while you revise.

The opening: engage the reader with opening sentences; give necessary information (author, story title); indicate your thesis; indicate what your organization will be. In addition to announcing your thesis early, keep the thesis in view throughout the essay (often the concluding sentence of each paragraph refers back to the thesis, shows how the paragraph supports the thesis, or keeps the thesis in view).

In the closing, do not simply repeat the thesis or say, "thus we see." Strategies: 1) refer back to something in intro. to give sense of closure; 2) offer a new bit of evidence to drive your point home; 3) indicate that the thesis, now established, can be used in other investigations.

4. Editing: checking spelling, punctuation, and accuracy of quotations. Give credit to sources. Type a clean copy in correct format (see sample essays in Kennedy and MLA guidelines).

Notice that the whole process of writing about literature is really a process of responding and of revising one's responses—not only one's responses to the work of literature but also to one's own writing about those responses (Kennedy 57).