

Writing the Literary Essay:

1. Generally speaking, a literary essay follows quite closely the five paragraph essay structure you have studied before.
2. Introduction:
 - Contains the complete title (appropriately punctuated) and the author
 - A brief (2-4 sentence) summary of the work, particularly focusing on those story elements most closely related to your thesis.
 - A well-worded thesis that restates the essay question or that develops the key aspect you wish to develop in your analysis. This thesis should be worded as a persuasive thesis, because a literary essay focuses on your interpretation of some aspect of a literary work and your arguments “proving” your interpretation is valid.
 - If the intro to a literary essay has an “interest arouser,” it is very short.
3. Body Paragraphs:
 - Begin with a topic sentence that develops one aspect of the thesis.
[For this paper, you could identify three themes that reveal the author's purpose and then examine how each theme accomplishes that, or you could examine how the motif develops one or more symbols—if one symbol how it appears in three different ways or if more, one symbol per paragraph—or lastly, how the motif evolves in purpose—thematically or symbolically—from beginning to middle to end of the work.]
 - The body of the paragraph should give quotes and examples from the literary work that “prove” your thesis is valid.
 - The magic number of quotes/examples is “3,” both in developing the paragraph and in the number of paragraphs
 - Be sure to use parenthetical documentation if you use a direct quote.
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 - Complete the paragraph with a clincher sentence that discusses how the quotes and examples support the thesis. This sentence gives your interpretation of the meaning or significance of your proof. Why is this important? What universal truth does this concept reveal? What significance does this idea have to the literary work as a whole? These are a few of the ideas this sentence should develop. [Note: This is the part of the literary essay most frequently overlooked by young writers. It is also the most important.]
 - In terms of organizational patterns for development, the body paragraphs may be written several ways, depending on the writer's choice of topics:
 - As example paragraphs
 - As comparison/contrast
 - As analogy, wherein the writer explains a very abstract concept in terms of something more concrete the reader will understand
 - As persuasive arguments using order of importance
 - As cause/effect
4. Conclusion:
 - Do not summarize or restate the thesis.
 - Additionally, the conclusion of a literary essay often relates the key themes or ideas or literary techniques the author uses to the readers' experiences or lives. How does what occurs in the literary work relate to the modern American? What new insights about life or literature have you experienced that you can share with your reader? What universal truths are now revealed? How does this essay reveal insights about the genre?
 - Do not introduce any new topic ideas in the conclusion. Do not end with a question.
5. Rules for using quotes:
 - If the quote is four lines or shorter, include it in the text of your essay using quotation marks and other necessary punctuation. Copy the quote exactly. You may quote complete sentences or partial sentences. If you quote partial sentences, make sure your sentence leading to the partial quote is smooth and “seamless.” If you leave out part of a sentence, use an ellipsis (...). If you leave out more than just part of one sentence, your ellipsis must have four periods (....). The fourth period is the final period of the sentence.
 - If your quote is five lines or longer, set off the quotation by indenting it five spaces from both sides of the margin. Do not put quotation marks around this indented quote. However, if what you quote has quotation marks around it in the original article, you must use quotation marks.
6. Include a Work Cited at the end of your literary essay; a Works Cited, if you have used another source.