**A Guide to Writing the Literary Analysis Essay**

1. **INTRODUCTION**: the first paragraph in your essay. It begins creatively in order to catch your reader’s interest, provides essential background about the literary work, and prepares the reader for your major thesis. The introduction must include the author and title of the work as well as an explanation of the theme to be discussed. Other essential background may include setting, an introduction of main characters, etc. The major thesis goes in this paragraph usually at the end. Because the major thesis sometimes sounds tacked on, make special attempts to link it to the sentence that precedes it by building on a key word or idea.

**A)** ***Creative Opening/Hook***: the beginning sentences of the introduction that catch the reader’s interest. Ways of beginning creatively include the following:

**1)** **A startling fact or bit of information**

**✓Example**: Nearly two hundred citizens were arrested as witches during the Salem witch scare of 1692. Eventually nineteen were hanged, and another was pressed to death (Marks 65).

**2) A snatch of dialogue between two characters**

**✓Example**: “It is another thing. You cannot know about it unless you have it.” “ Well,” I said. “If I ever get it I will tell you” (Hemingway 72). With these words, the priest in Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* sends the hero, Frederic, in search of the ambiguous “it” in his life.

**3) A meaningful quotation** (from the book you are analyzing or another source)

**✓Example**: “To be, or not to be, that is the question” {3.1.57}. This familiar statement expresses the young prince’s moral dilemma in William Shakespeare’s tragedy *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

**4) A universal idea**

**✓Example**: The terrifying scenes a soldier experiences on the front probably follow him throughout his life—if he manages to survive the war.

**5) A rich, vivid description of the setting**

**✓Example**: Sleepy Maycomb, like other Southern towns, suffers considerably during the Great Depression. Poverty reaches from the privileged families, like the Finches, to the Negroes and “white trash” Ewells, who live on the outskirts of town. Harper Lee paints a vivid picture of life in this humid Alabama town where tempers and bigotry explode into conflict.

**B)** ***Thesis***: a statement that provides the subject and overall opinion of your essay. For a literary analysis your major thesis must (1) relate to the theme of the work and (2) suggest how this theme is revealed by the author. A good thesis may also suggest the organization of the paper.

**✓Example**: Through Paul’s experience behind the lines, at a Russian prisoner of war camp, and especially under bombardment in the trenches, Erich Maria Remarque realistically shows how war dehumanizes a man.

Sometimes a thesis becomes too cumbersome to fit into one sentence. In such cases, you may express the major thesis as two sentences.

**✓Example**: In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens shows the process by which a wasted life can be redeemed. Sidney Carton, through his love for Lucie Manette, is transformed from a hopeless, bitter man into a hero whose life and death have meaning.

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**II. BODY PARAGRAPHS:** the support paragraphs of your essay. These paragraphs contain supporting Example: (concrete detail) and analysis/explanation (commentary) for your topic sentences. Each paragraph in the body includes (1) a topic sentence, (2) textual evidence (a.k.a. quotes from your reading) and commentary (a.k.a. explanation), and (3) a concluding sentence. In its simplest form, each body paragraph is organized as follows:

**1. topic sentence**

**2. lead-in to textual evidence 1**

**3. textual evidence 1**

**4. commentary**

**5. transition and lead-in to textual evidence 2**

**6. textual evidence 2**

**7. commentary**

**8. concluding or clincher sentence**

**1) Topic Sentence**: the first sentence of a body or support paragraph. It identifies one aspect of the major thesis and states a primary reason why the major thesis is true.

**✓Example**: When he first appears in the novel, Sidney Carton is a loveless outcast who sees little worth in himself or in others.

**2) Textual Evidence**: a specific example from the work used to provide evidence for your topic sentence. Textual evidence can be a combination of paraphrase and direct quotation from the work.

**✓Example**: When Carlton and Darnay first meet at the tavern, Carlton tells him, “I care for no man on this earth, and no man cares for me” (Dickens 105).

**3) Commentary**: your explanation and interpretation of the textual evidence. Commentary tells the reader what the author of the text means or how the textual evidence proves the topic sentence. Commentary may include interpretation, analysis, argument, insight, and/or reflection. (Helpful hint: In your body paragraph, you should have twice as much commentary as textual evidence. In other words, for every sentence of textual evidence, you should have at least two sentences of commentary.)

**✓Example**: Carton makes this statement as if he were excusing his rude behavior to Darnay. Carton, however, is only pretending to be polite, perhaps to amuse himself. With this seemingly off-the-cuff remark, Carton reveals a deeper cynicism and his emotional isolation.

**4) Transitions**: words or phrases that connect or “hook” one idea to the next, both between and within paragraphs. Transition devices include using connecting words as well as repeating key words or using synonyms.

**✓Examples**: Finally, in the climax… Another example: … Later in the story… In contrast to this behavior… Not only…but also… Furthermore…

**5) Lead-In**: phrase or sentence that prepares the reader for textual evidence by introducing the speaker, setting, and/or situation.

**✓Example**: Later, however, when the confident Sidney Carton returns alone to his home, his alienation and unhappiness become apparent: “Climbing into a high chamber in a well of houses, he threw himself down in his clothes on a neglected bed, and its pillow was wet with wasted tears” (Dickens 211).

**6) Clincher/Concluding Sentence**: last sentence of the body paragraph. It concludes the paragraph by tying the textual evidence and commentary back to the thesis.

**✓Example**: Thus, before Carton experiences love, he is able to convince himself that the world has no meaning.

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**III. CONCLUSION**: last paragraph in your essay. This paragraph should begin by echoing your major thesis without repeating the words exactly. Then, the conclusion should broaden from the thesis statements to answer the “so what?” question your reader may have after reading your essay. The conclusion should do one or more of the following:

**1) Reflect on how your essay topic relates to the book as a whole**

**2) Evaluate how successful the author is in achieving his or her goal or message**

**3) Give a personal statement about the topic**

**4) Make predictions**

**5) Connect back to your creative opening**

**6) Give your opinion of the novel’s value or significance**

**HOW TO CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE WITHIN YOUR PAPER**

For this literary analysis paper, you will be using ONLY a primary source--in this case, the dystopian novel you are analyzing.

In your essay, book titles will be italicized.

**Example**: In Orwell’s *1984*, …

 A major theme in *The Handmaid’s Tale* is…

 *Fahrenheit 451* explores the issue of censorship by…

 The boys of *Lord of the Flies* represent…

 *Brave New World*, by Albert Huxley, takes place in…

**PARENTHETICAL DOCUMENTATION** is how you will indicate the location of evidence used in your essay. Before the period of a sentence that uses text evidence, include the page number in parentheses. The first time you refer to text evidence, include the author’s last name and page number in the parentheses.

# **Example:** Readers of *Brave New World* could be forgiven for seeing World State society as more utopian then dystopian. As Mustapha Mond explains, “The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get” (Huxley 220).

But for the *rest* of your paper, only use the page number for parenthetical documentation.

# **Example**: While the other boys imagine a monster of claws and teeth, only Simon suspects that the beast is really the evil within the boys themselves. When he ponders “the beast, there rose before his inward sight the picture of a human at once heroic and sick” (103).

**WORKS CITED** is a separate page at the end of your essay listing all the works cited in your essay. It simplifies documentation because it permits you to make only brief references to those works in the test (parenthetical documentation). A “Works Cited” page differs from a “Bibliography” in that the latter includes sources researched but not actually cited in the paper. All the entries on a “Works Cited” page are double spaced.

For a book with a single author, the author’s name appears in last name, first name format. The basic form for a book citation is: **Last Name, First Name. Title of Book. Publisher, Publication Date.**

**Example: Orwell, George. *1984*. Penguin Classics, 1950.**

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