The Literary Analysis Essay

If you master this format...

• You’ll have a solid “go-to” format for high-stakes testing experiences.
• You’ll have mastery over a universally recognized analytical structure that lets you communicate your ideas clearly.

Choose a Clever Title

• Always write a clever — but not overly cute — title that includes:
  – Your topic
  – The author
  – The text’s title

For your title, consider...

Helpful devices that will make it ‘pop’ —

• **Alliteration** (repeated first sounds in a series of words: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers)
• **Consonance** (repeated consonant sounds: dark, deep, dreadful)
• **Assonance** (repeated vowel sounds: fleet, sheep, sweep, geek)
• **Paradox** (two opposing ideas, revealing a truth: Stone walls do not a prison make)
• **Oxymoron** (putting two contradictory words together: jumbo shrimp, act naturally, definitely maybe)
• **Understatement** (draws attention to the obvious: The King and Duke are not nice men)
• **Irony**
• **Metaphor**
• **Simile**

An Example...

Prejudice, Paternalism, and Pride in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*

Author

Text title

(notice that it is in ITALICS)

The Introduction

• Your title must be connected to your **thesis**, which comes at the end of your introduction.
• The introduction also includes:
  – A hook
  – A relevant context
  – A ‘pivot point’
  – And, finally, a thesis
The Introduction

‘Funnel-Shaped’

Starts BROADLY by connecting with the audience

Finishes NARROWLY by stating the thesis and upcoming “proofs”

The Hook

• One to three sentences that capture your reader’s attention.
  – Avoid being overly dramatic, but consider the same literary devices you’ll consider for your title, in addition to a relevant quote or question.
  – Example: When considering the lessons one learns while growing up, not many people would include the ability to be “uncivilized.”

The Context

• Several sentences that establish a relevant, real-world context which suggests a potential intellectual “payoff” for your reader.
  – Could include:
    • Historical context
    • Cultural commentary
    • Celebrity appeal
    • Anecdote

Example: Americans define “being civilized” in different ways. Some say it means using utensils and proper table manners, rather than eating with one’s hands. Others may say it means living in a modern home in a modern city where everything one needs is easily at hand. And still others might say a civilized person is someone who opposes all violence, including war.

The Pivot-Point

• Echoes back to the context and signals a move forward to the thesis. This is often where you will name the author and text.
  – Example: What constitutes civilized behavior can have multiple meanings depending on one’s life experiences and point of view, which Mark Twain explores in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

The Thesis

• One sentence that “powers” your entire essay.
  • It is a declarative (stated as fact) but arguable statement.
    • Examples:
      • Mark Twain’s use of the child narrator in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn presents an authentic voice through which he effectively shows the ironies and inconsistencies of the pre-Civil War and post-Reconstruction South.
      • Written in 1870, Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is intended to condemn post-Civil War American society as racist and corrupt.
The Thesis

- Steps to writing a thesis statement:
  1. Decide on your topic.
     The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
  2. Narrow Your Topic.
     The idea of being civilized.
  3. Put your topic in a sentence.
     Mark Twain talks about being civilized in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.
  4. Add your argument, viewpoint, or opinion to your topic to make your thesis arguable.
     Twain’s novel suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must reject “civilized” society.

Thesis Statement

- It is the POINT you are trying to prove.
  - Example:
    Twain's novel suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must reject "civilized" society.

Organization

- Many essay introductions include a statement of “projected organization,” typically in three parts (to correspond with body paragraphs).
- Frequently, this is tacked on to the beginning or ending of the thesis statement.

Organization

Example — As Huck grows from a boy who first thinks of slaves as less than human to one who forms a family bond with a slave and comes to believe that slave must be freed, Twain's novel suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must reject "civilized" society.

Preview Statement

Thesis Statement

Introduction Pitfalls

- Do not praise the author or text, as in “this is a a great book by Mark Twain.”
- Do not state your intention, as in “In this paper I will…” or “This paper will explore…”
Body Paragraphs

- Typically consist of 3 sections, each of which may contain one or more paragraphs.
- Sections are presented in the exact order that they are presented in the projected organization in the thesis.
- Each section begins with a topic sentence which specifically relates to the thesis.

Body Paragraphs

1st Body Para.

- ARGUMENT #1
- TOPIC SENTENCE
- CONTEXT and CLAIM
- EVIDENCE
- ANALYSIS

Each topic sentence should be followed by 3 claim-evidence-analysis sequences.

Body Paragraphs

2nd Body Para.

- ARGUMENT #2
- TOPIC SENTENCE
- CONTEXT and CLAIM
- EVIDENCE
- ANALYSIS

Each topic sentence should be followed by 3 claim-evidence-analysis sequences.

Body Paragraphs

3rd Body Para.

- ARGUMENT #3
- TOPIC SENTENCE
- CONTEXT and CLAIM
- EVIDENCE
- ANALYSIS

Each topic sentence should be followed by 3 claim-evidence-analysis sequences.

Topic Sentences

- They should reflect back on your thesis, and determine the focus of your paragraph.
  - Example:
    
    Thesis: As Huck grows from a boy who first thinks of slaves as less than human to one who forms a family bond with a slave and comes to believe that slave must be freed, Twain’s novel suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must reject “civilized” society.
    
    Topic sentence #1: In the early chapters, it is clear Huck sees no humanity in the slaves and considers them mostly as a source of amusement.
Body Paragraphs

• For the previous topic sentence — *In the early chapters, it is clear Huck sees no humanity in the slaves and considers them mostly as a source of amusement.* — determine what parts of the story support – or prove – this assertion.
• Those will be your “proof” for the claim-evidence-analysis sections.

Claim-Evidence-Analysis

• Claim — The smaller point your quote will make, which proves your larger topic sentence, which proves your even larger thesis.
  – Keep your focus on making arguable, declarative statements, and backing them up with evidence from the text.
• Evidence (quote) — Pulled directly from the book
• Analysis — Explain what the quote proves.
  – But do **NOT** say “this quote proves…”!!

Claim-Evidence-Analysis

• Quotes must be embedded smoothly, not just dropped in with no context.
  – Example of claim-quote-analysis sequence:
    Huck gets more and more concerned about helping Jim escape to freedom, because he thinks he is committing a sin [claim]. As Huck and Jim get nearer to Cairo and Jim’s eventual freedom, [context for the quote—what is going on in the story at this time] Huck says to himself, "I got to feeling so mean and so miserable I most wished I was dead." [quote] and notes how awful he feels watching Jim celebrate his coming freedom. "Everytime he danced around and says, ‘Dah’s Cairo!’ it went through me like a shot, and I thought that if it was Cairo I reckoned I would die of miserableness" [92] [quote]. As Huck and Jim near the Ohio River at Cairo, where Jim will sail north to freedom, Huck begins to question his actions in helping Jim. If they make it, Huck believes, he will have done a terrible thing by helping a slave escape [analysis].

Using Quotations

• Remember that you are **arguing** and **analyzing**, not simply retelling the story.
  – Here is an example of how many writers go wrong:
    In William Shakespeare’s play, "Romeo and Juliet," these are the first two lines of the "Prologue" as spoken by "The Chorus":
    "Two households, both alike in dignity, In fair Verona, where we lay our scene…"
  – Here is a typical "**retelling**":
    Here, Shakespeare is saying that the play is set in Verona where there are two dignified families.
  – Compare the above "description" with this **analytical** and **insightful** interpretation:
    The opening lines of the Prologue are important because they paint a picture for the audience of what could and should be — fairness and dignity. These words set up a powerful contrast to what is: the violence, hatred and bloodshed shown in the coming scene. It will be against this violent backdrop that the pure love of Romeo and Juliet will have to struggle.

Transition to Next Paragraph

• Each body paragraph must end in a sentence which transitions to the next body paragraph or to the overall conclusion.
  – Consider using two or three words from your topic sentence, and previewing upcoming paragraphs as you transition into the next paragraph:

  **Example:**
  Topic Sentence: *In the early chapters, it is clear Huck sees no humanity in the slaves and considers them mostly as a source of amusement.*
  Transitional sentence at the end of the paragraph to next paragraph:
  *Huck’s lack of consideration for slaves, evident early in the novel, becomes tested as the story continues and his relationship with Jim grows closer.*
Transitional Words

- Words you can use going into and out of paragraphs and sentences to suggest certain analytical relationships.

### Some Rules

- Quotes must:
  - be properly punctuated
  - span the book/story/play/article
  - include the page number where you found them in parentheses (203)
  - have some context telling what is going on in the story where you found it

- Do NOT use 1st (‘I, me’) or 2nd (‘you’) person. ONLY use 3rd (she, he, they) person.

- Discuss quotes in the present tense:
  - When the steamboat wrecks (not wrecked) Jim and Huck’s raft...
  - When Tom suggests (not suggested) they put rattlesnakes in Jim’s shack...
  - As Jim and Huck float (not floated) down the river...

- For a quote within a quote, use single quote marks:
  - “When I was fifty yards off, Jim says: ‘Dah you goes, de ole true Huck; de on’y white genlman dat ever kep’ his promise to ole Jim.’ Well, I just felt sick” (93).

- Do NOT engage in excessive plot summary. Only describe enough plot to give context for the passages you quote to support your arguments.

### Conclusion

- The concluding paragraph should leave your reader with the impression that you have successfully made your case.
  - Apply your argument, in a seamless way, to the contemporary world. Leave your reader with a sense of the importance and relevance of your work.
  - Try to provide a “clincher” that reaches back to the “hook” in the introduction, thus allowing your essay to come “full circle.”

### MLA Style Format

- Typed, double space, margins set at 1 inch all around
- Ordinary font (such as Times, Cambria), in 12 point type
- Black ink on white paper

- It should have:
  - Name, date, class info in upper left corner
  - A creative, relevant title, centered just above the start of the paper, no bolding.
  - Page numbering in the upper right of the page, with your last name followed by page number
  - No cover page, except rubric
These are the page formatting requirements of MLA Style.

MLA stands for Modern Language Association. It is the preferred style for most college papers.

MLA Format

1. Your Name
2. Teacher’s Name
3. Class and Hour
4. Date

Center Title of Essay

Begin your paragraph one double spaced line below your centered title. The paragraph should begin with a 1/2 inch indent. The paper’s heading goes in title center.作文或短文 europe only 1/2 margins all around. Double space everything, including blocked quotes. Do not justify the right margin.