



How to Write the Literary Analysis Essay

A good literary analysis essay will retell the essential parts of a story for those that don't know it, explaining piece by piece the symbolism of the big events and smaller details. As far as symbolism goes, all events and details will be symbols of one message from the author.

In other words, your retelling will all be in support of one idea, your thesis, which states the main *message* of the author.

Below are

- (1) a **sample structure**/how-to information for doing a literary analysis essay for my class -- including what I expect in the thesis (more on the thesis later...);
- (2) the **Rubric sheet** I will use to score these papers, and you will use for peer editing;

Basic Literary Analysis Essay Structure

Paragraph 1.

Grabber

Orient the reader to piece of literature and its contextual background (SOAPStone.)

Thesis Statement

Body Paragraphs: In EVERY paragraph (3), include the following:

Evidence

- (1) What's up? What is it? What happened, etc... (contextual background text.)
- (2) Quotes from the text and your Commentary – your insightful, thoughtful, analysis of the significance of the quote (DIDLS.)
- (3) Connect evidence to thesis.

Conclusion: End with a BANG! Connect to something new and different, locally, nationally, globally, etc.... Make a point!

Here's what these terms mean, in more depth, along with a few other tips:

Grabber. Grab the reader's attention with the first line. You can do this with action, a deep thought or question, vivid description, or dialogue.

Orient Reader. In 1-3 sentences, identify the title, author, and subject of the piece of literature. Don't summarize the whole piece in detail. But write just enough, as if to assume the reader knows nothing yet about the piece of literature.

Thesis. The thesis is your angle. It is what you will organize all your evidence around. A thesis can't be purely true; it has to be able to be argued one way or the other.

In a literary analysis essay, it should mention the author. It should specifically identify *what (specifically)* the author is saying about a *general subject*, like life, relationships, gender, or class.

In other words, it should be a rewording of this formula: **(Author's name) is making a point about (general subject); the specific point s/he is making is that _____.**

It should suggest that the author is using the characters, setting, plot or voice to make that specific point about a general subject. Hammer DIDLS !

Evidence—on two levels: one, support your thesis with **events** that happened in the piece of literature (this is to show the context of your quotes). But stay focused: don't summarize the entire piece unless it's as evidence for an idea of yours.

Two, use **quotes** (with citations) from the piece of literature. "Quotes" just means excerpts; they don't have to be dialogue. Try to incorporate them into your context, by having quotes and context share sentences. For example:

Not incorporated:

Janie's images for romantic happiness come from nature. "Life should be more like a pear tree in bloom, she thinks" (p. 67). She thinks this when she is unhappy in her relationships.

Incorporated:

Because Janie's image for romantic happiness comes from nature, she thinks, "Life should be more like a pear tree in bloom" (p. 67) when she is unhappy in her relationship.

Notice, in the examples above, how to punctuate around quotes, and how to mark the page numbers. For marking page numbers, put (p. ____) in parentheses after the quote ends, followed by the period or comma that would be inside the quotes, if the sentence needs one.

More on specific good ways to incorporate quotations will come later.

Commentary. Make sure that before or after each quote, you point out how it connects to the thesis. As with blending in quotes, you can do this with variety and finesse. (You don't have to mention the word "thesis," or say the term, "proves my point.") For example:

Repetitious and obvious: This also proves the thesis because a rich man is happier with an expensive toy than he is when in love.

Subtle yet effective: Once again, O'Neil portrays rich men as happier with expensive toys than in love.

Another tip: Write in Third Person, Present tense.... Avoid pointing out that you are writing an essay. Don't write, "In this essay I will..." or "I will first describe... and then I will..." or "When I first started to think about this subject..." or "In conclusion, I have proven..."

All of the above information is the very basic approach. You will be required to do more sophisticated literary analysis and writing as the course progresses and evolves.

See the basic literary analysis essay scoring rubric below:



Literary Analysis Essay Scoring Rubric

<i>Element</i>	<i>Explanation</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Sort of</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Grabber, Orientation	First sentence catches reader's attention. Then writer identifies the author, book title, and gives a brief, accurate description of the story (in the first paragraph) and utilizes SOAPStone.	0		10
Thesis Statement	Thesis describes what the author is trying to say about a general subject, like love/war, relationships, society, gender, race, politics, nature, etc...	0		10
Thesis: Specific Use and Focus	What you say the author says, about the general subject, is specific and precise. Connects the body paragraphs, provides focus for the entire essay. Also, it fits the piece of literature and your evidence.	0		10
Evidence: Context/ Events: Quantity	Writer uses at least five events from the book.	0		10
Evidence: Context/ Events: Quality	These all connect to the thesis. No big events in the piece of literature should have been addressed, based on your thesis, but were not. You thoroughly describe what's happening, filling in details for those who haven't read the book. Every paragraph has a topic sentence.	0		10
Evidence: Quotes: Quantity	Every paragraph gets a quote or two (for at least five total).	0		10
Evidence: Quotes: Quality	Quotes match the context/event they are connected to. Most are blended into context sentences. Page numbers are included and formatted correctly.	0		10
Evidence: Commentary/ Connections to thesis	All evidence is clearly, explicitly shown to connect to the thesis. The wording is not repetitive, though.	0		10
Mechanics:	Grammar, punctuation, spelling are flawless.	0		10
Playing by the rules	Paper is perfectly on time, handwritten, (or typed if permitted with advance approval), titled, double-spaced, 3-7 pages, stapled, with student's name, period #, date, etc...	0		10
Total Score:				
Reduction for paper being late, or extra-sloppy?				

Student's Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Title of Piece of Literature under Analysis: _____

Comments:
