

McKnight

Essay Writing

Step One

Decide on the texts you want to use in your paper. Reread important sections. Consider the author's purpose, tone, and use of rhetorical devices. Jot down page numbers and important ideas.

Step Two

Brainstorm a topic. Think carefully about the texts you chose. What do they have in common? How are they different? Do you notice any relationships between themes, etc. in the works? Jot down some ideas and free write about themes, characters, figurative language, rhetorical situations, etc. Look for common threads between the studied pieces. (Note that it is also good to look for ways in which they refute one another.)

Step Three

Develop a thesis statement that makes an argument/claim or convinces your reader of something about the texts.

~Try to avoid using the words "similar" or "different" in your thesis.

~Be sure to identify the authors (full names) and works in your thesis.

Step Four

Develop an outline that gives your thesis and the main points of your paper. Fill in the outline with specific quotes or passages that relate to that portion of your thesis statement.

Step Five

Draft your body paragraphs:

1. Be sure they contain strong topic sentences that relate back to your thesis.
2. Use specific textual examples (one or two) to support your point.
3. Give an explanation or analysis of the evidence to show its relevance to your thesis. Do not leave a quote standing alone. Always explain its significance!
4. Use appropriate transitions.

Checklist for body paragraphs:

When reviewing your body paragraphs, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Have I opened with a clear, direct topic sentence?

2. Have I incorporated textual evidence from my primary source?
3. Have I cited my textual evidence correctly?
4. Have I elaborated upon or adequately explained my textual evidence?
5. Have I analyzed my textual evidence?

Quick questions to ask for help with analyzing:

- *What are the causes of this?
- *What are the effects of this?
- *What does this really mean to the bigger idea I want to get across in my paper?
- *What does this evidence imply or what inferences can I make?
- *Are there any rhetorical devices (any figurative language, ethos, pathos, logos, bias, propaganda, etc.)?
- *What is the author's purpose?
- *Does the evidence provide historical or cultural context? If so, explain and tell how the current historical or cultural context is different.

6. Have I added any secondary source(outside research) evidence?
7. If secondary source evidence is present, check for numbers 3-5 again.
8. Have I included a transition that wraps up this topic and introduces my next one?

TIPS:

~DO NOT RETELL OR SUMMARIZE THE PLOT OF THE TEXT.

~ Focus on historical and cultural perspectives if possible; you may also choose to incorporate these aspects into your conclusion (see descriptions in conclusion area).

~ Instead, once you find a quote or passage that you want to use as textual evidence, insert it into the paper, followed by analysis (at least two sentences analyzing the quotes relevance to your thesis statement). Do not use the words "you" or "your." For primary source papers, you may use the pronoun "I" in areas of the paper where you are relaying a personal example (conclusion), however avoid using "I" in the body. There, the focus

should be on using sources and textual information for support.

~For analysis of textual examples, consider the following: What are the causes/effects of this? What are the implications for the future? How does this relate to the theme of the work? Is figurative language present? How does this relate to the historical context or bigger picture? (See Analysis handout for further information.)

~When writing about literature be sure to always use the present tense.

~After you have introduced the author in your thesis, refer to him or her by last name only.

~Be sure to reproduce direct quotes exactly; paraphrasing is putting the quote into your own words.

~See the following examples of quoting literature:

Dickinson writes, "Hope is the thing with feathers/That perches in the soul" (l. 1-2).

**If it is clear what poem you are quoting, line numbers will suffice.

**Notice poetry line breaks are signaled with a forward slash "/".

Lyman asserts, "The car was alive" (Erdrich 2233).

**When quoting from an anthology, use the author's last name, not the editor's.

Hemingway describes the setting for the story:

The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went to Madrid. (210)

**If a quote is more than four lines, put it in single-spaced, block format (see MLA handbook).

**Do not use more than two block quotes in your paper.

~Never leave a quote standing. In other words, once you present a piece of textual

evidence (quote or paraphrase), you must use at least two sentences to explain or analyze its significance to your thesis.

~Never end a paragraph with a quote.

~Avoid stating: "In this paper I will discuss....", "In this paper I will tell you...." Don't tell me you are going to say something, just say it.

Repeat this process for each main point of your paper.

Step Six

Draft your introduction.

1. Begin your introduction with a quote or paraphrase from the text(s) that is relevant to your thesis. You may also begin with another creative opener, but be sure to "dive right in" to your paper. Avoid generalized or broad statements about life, people, the world, etc.

2. Use a "connector" sentence or two to explain or "link" your introductory quote with your thesis statement.

3. Your thesis statement should be the last sentence of your introduction. Remember your thesis must contain works discussed, along with the author's full names, and an argument about those texts.

TIP: The introduction does not have to be lengthy. It is more important that you focus on the body of your paper and allow it to demonstrate your argument.

Step Seven

Draft your conclusion.

1. Use a transition phrase (In closing,) and finish the sentence with ONE wrap-up statement where you restate your thesis in a different way.

2. Move forward with your topic. Choose at least two of the following to include in the rest of your conclusion:

-**Narrative** (Maybe you have a personal story or have seen something on the news or Internet that relates to your topic. Use this method mainly for primary source papers.)

-**Historical context** (Focus on historical analysis --the study of change over time for your topic OR research the setting for your text and discuss the time period or era's effects on your

author and/or characters.)

-**Cultural context** (Focus on cultural analysis - the study of multiple perspectives.)

-**You** (Is this topic personally relevant to you and your future? Did this paper teach you or your reader something? Is this topic important to the modern reader? If so, why?). Use this method mainly for primary source papers.

-Rhetorical Questions (Use “bigger idea” questions that might not have an immediate answer. Also, does anything seem awry? You may list unanswered questions you still have about the text here.)

Step Eight

Put the paper aside for 24 hours. Come back and proofread your paper using the Proofreading Checklist below. Revise your paper.

Proofreading Checklist

Grammar:

Are all sentences complete? Are there any sentence fragments?

Are there any run-on sentences?

Do subjects and verbs agree?

Is all the vocabulary in the paper used correctly?

Does each pronoun clearly refer to something?

Is every word spelled correctly?

Does every sentence contain proper punctuation and capitalization?

Style:

Does my paper have the proper heading?

Is my paper formatted correctly?

Is my paper long enough? Does it cover the requirements of the assignment?

Does the paper follow the outline in order and content?

Do main points begin with transition words or are transitions clear and smooth?

Do new paragraphs begin with new ideas?

Do paragraphs begin with strong topic sentences that relate to the thesis?

Do paragraphs contain good textual evidence and analysis?

Can I eliminate wordiness?

Have I been repetitive with certain words or ideas? If so, eliminate them.

Have I used "thing," "you," or "a lot"? If so, rename them.

Have I spelled out numbers (except years, dates, and four digit or higher numbers)?

Do I have any contractions? If so, spell them out.

Have I tried to eliminate the use of passive voice?

Have I properly cited my quotes and paraphrases?

Did I use present tense when discussing literature?

Did I avoid plot summary?

Introduction:

Does my introduction follow the guidelines of step six of the writing handout?

Conclusion:

Does my conclusion follow the guidelines of step seven of the writing handout?

**Also, be sure to proofread using any rubrics that may be appropriate.

Step Nine

Brainstorm some possible catchy titles for your paper. Do not use the title of the story or work discussed as your title. Again, be creative!

Step Ten

Be sure your paper is in the proper format: Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double-spaced, one inch margins all around, with the heading in the top left corner. See the example below:

Joe Smith

EH 224

August 1, 2015

Creative Title

Step Eleven

Print off your paper. Re-read it; revise it again. Turn it in! Remember that I do not accept late papers.

It must be uploaded or turned in by the beginning of class on its due date.