

Literary Essay Outline Sample

If you are having trouble with your literary essay, follow this outline. It will provide you with a solid structure for your paper. If you feel you have the basics of the essay under control, go on to the qualities of an excellent literary essay.

I. First Paragraph—Introduction

- A. A broad statement introducing the subject in a general way in one or more sentences (this may be a statement of theme)
- B. A specific reference to the title and author
- C. Thesis statement presenting the main idea of the paper in one sentence (should reveal a plan for the paper and a “so what”)

II. Second Paragraph—Body (suggestion: follow the quotation sandwich paragraph model)

- A. 1st point from the thesis statement — a generalization; make a claim
- B. Discussion
- C. An example or quotation to support your generalization
- D. Analysis and interpretation of the supporting evidence to show how it supports the generalization in your topic sentence
 - 1. Literary element
 - a. Example from your quotation
 - b. Another example from your quotation
 - 2. Another literary element
 - 3. Another element of style
- E. Concluding sentence which ties this paragraph to your thesis
- F. Transition statement

III. Third Paragraph—Body (suggestion: follow the quotation sandwich paragraph model)

- A. 2nd point from the thesis statement — a generalization; make a claim
- B. An example or quotation to support your generalization
- C. Analysis and interpretation of the supporting evidence to show how it supports the generalization in your topic sentence
- D. Discussion of the writer’s choices
- E. Concluding sentence which ties this paragraph to your thesis
- F. Transition into next part

IV. Fourth Paragraph—Body (suggestion: follow the quotation sandwich paragraph model)

- A. 3rd point from the thesis statement — a generalization; make a claim
- B. An example or quotation to support your generalization
- C. Analysis and interpretation of the supporting evidence to show how it supports the generalization in your topic sentence
- D. Another example or quotation to support your generalization
Analysis and discussion of supporting evidence with a connection to the prior example
- E. Another example or quotation to support your generalization
- F. Concluding sentence which ties this paragraph to your thesis
- G. Transition into conclusion

Fifth Paragraph—Conclusion

- A. Thoughtful explanation of the significance of your thesis (answers the "so what?" question)
- B. Formulate and synthesize connections between ideas
- C. Connect to the book as a whole/self/world

*number of body paragraphs may vary based on assignment and length of paper.

Qualities of an Excellent Literary Paper

Title

- brief yet illuminating
- relevant and connected to topic
- tone in keeping with the rest of the paper
- clear and not too wordy

Introduction

- identifies topic
- states thesis
- to the point
- includes a direct reference to title and author
- invites reading
- appropriate tone to purpose

Thesis

- significant
- clearly stated and precise
- limited
- debatable
- contains a plan for discussion, all connected to a statement about the topic
- reasoned and not arbitrary (words like because, as a result, etc. suggest you're on the right track)

Body Paragraphs

- main points clearly stated
- smooth and logical transitions between and within paragraphs
- general point made specific through reference to text
- quotations smoothly incorporated and thoroughly analyzed, showing relevance to and support for main points
- discussion of the writer's choices (language, structure, style, literary features, etc.)
- concluding sentence ties to thesis

Organization

- ideas developed in proportion to their significance
- logical and climactic arrangement of paragraphs
- order is appropriate to thesis
- organized by topics/sub-topics and ideas grouped together into categories

Conclusion

- grows naturally from preceding paragraphs
- explains significance of thesis
- provides a sense of completion without simply repeating

Content

- unpretentious
- definite, focused, cohesive
- shows that writer has given careful thought to the topic
- well-nourished with specific supports
- relies on careful analysis of text
- developed through specific details and mature interpretations [follows 3-step plan of presentation 1) generalizations, 2) details related to generalizations, and 3) analysis and interpretation of the details in relation to the thesis]
- limits plot summary to the minimum needed for clarity of analysis
- shows independent thinking, unusual insights or perspective

Control of Written Language/Conventions

- fluent expression
- sentences controlled for rhetorical purposes (use the rhetorical device packet to add impact to your work)
- each sentence has a logical relationship to surrounding sentences and fits smoothly into its context
- variety of sentence lengths and patterns
- precise and fresh word choice
- natural and appropriate diction level
- meaning emphasized through creative effects [use of figurative language, sonic devices, parallel structure, etc.] when useful and appropriate
- uses present tense when talking about literature
- no errors in mechanics and usage

Format

- typed, double-spaced
- in-text citations and works cited page follow MLA format
- stapled in upper left corner
- proper heading and page numbers

Additional Resources:

<http://culturalidentity.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu/2011/09/30/mapping-an-outline-for-literary-analysis/>

<http://www2.ivcc.edu/lockwood/Current/1001/Essay3/SampleLiteraryAnalysisOutline.html>

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Outlining.html>