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ENG 300

Anatomy of an Essay:

(A Very Specific **Title** that Includes Keywords and/or the Author & Text You'll be Discussing)

The first sentence immediately introduces the author's full name and title of the text. The opening paragraph presents the main themes the paper will be tackling, posing any problems or tensions that are motivation for the creation of your thesis. What instigated you to write on this topic? What is the question you are attempting to answer or the cliché you are trying to 'correct'? A "**roadmapping**" sentence signals to the reader which authors and which texts will be discussed (and in what order). From this sentence, your audience gets a clear understanding of how your paper will be organized. Present any key terms or concepts that will be useful for the rest of your paper. The **thesis**, a specific, argumentative statement that is not merely descriptive, comes towards the end of the introduction paragraph.

A **topic sentence** introduces what is to come in the first body paragraph and the mini-argument you hope to prove. Just one or two sentences are enough to introduce the block quote:

The **block quote** is indented and a proper citation is provided at the end of the passage. For example: Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the imagination": and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. (Shelley p. 14)

Follow up immediately with **close reading** of the passage above. Use "in-text quotations" to pull out words or phrases from the block quote above. Discuss any literary devices the author has used and what effect this has on the reader or on the work as a whole. Now,

relate your close reading to your broader thesis statement. How does your passage prove your thesis?

A **transition sentence** eases the reader's way in from Body Paragraph 1 to Body Paragraph 2. The **topic sentence** here should signal whatever mini-argument you are hoping to make with this next piece of evidence. The second block quote is introduced by means of comparison to the preceding paragraph.

Block Quote 2 comes here, properly indented and with a parenthetical citation at the end. Whatever passage you choose to quote, make sure that you have close reading points or commentary that apply to each sentence. Otherwise, use ellipses...to cut out the parts you have nothing to say about. Quote effectively and economically. (Keats ll. 45-55)

As you **close read** this next passage, you will again use "in-text quotations" to pull out phrases and words from the larger passage. You will have more **discussion** points this time around, however, because you'll want to relate Example 2 to Example 1. Are we seeing the same thing here? Is your thesis argument escalating in any way? Does Example 2 differ from Example 1 in important ways? Relate back to your thesis statement as a whole. Zoom out momentarily if this helps.

Pave the way for Example #3 with another **transition sentence** and/or **topic sentence**. One or two sentences of setup is fine. Avoid long summaries! In fact, avoid any plot summary at all unless it is absolutely necessary.

This is **Block Quote 3**, and hopefully you are getting the hang of things by now! Sometimes, if the points you want to close read don't happen to all come in succession or tidily within one paragraph, you can quote a few sentences here and there, weaving them into your paragraph instead. In that case, you won't block quote at all, but use in-text quotations. Make sure that your quoted sentences are properly incorporated into the grammar of your sentence, however. (Byron p. 44)

In this **discussion** section you will probably have the most to present. Don't forget to **close read** this passage specifically before moving on and making connections to everything you've said before in your paper. At this point you may be feeling the "snowman effect," since hopefully your thesis has 3 examples to build upon by now. Remember to zoom out slightly when you relate back to your thesis. This will help usher in your conclusion.

The **conclusion** is a great time to revisit your **thesis** and **key terms**, seeing how your audience's perspective may have changed since first encountering the texts. How does your thesis help improve our understanding of the works at hand? What is the new angle that you have presented? Do reinforce your thesis statement here, but rather than repeating it verbatim, try opening up its significance more broadly. How have your key terms changed in meaning or perspective? Does your theory apply to other characters? To other works by the same author(s)? To other authors of the same period? Try to answer the question "**so what?**" so that your thesis is not merely descriptive but impactful in some forceful way, no matter how narrow this impact may be. Reflect now on your **essay title** and revise if need be. Now, go back and **proofread!** Does simply rereading your introduction and the topic sentences give you a decent sense of the paper? It should. Finally, choose 5 areas in the paper where the wording seems weak and replace it with more effective vocabulary. It'd be even better to trade papers with a classmate and have a fresh pair of eyes help you look for mistakes.

Works Cited

Each entry is alphabetized and in proper MLA format: Author's last name, first name.
Title. Place of publication: Publisher, Year.