

COMPOSE YOURSELF



Woodbridge High School
English Department
Handbook for Writing Analytical Essays

PREFACE

Anyone who's attended school has heard the dreaded words, "You have an essay due on..." For many people, this announcement can cause an immediate shut down of rational thought. Panic takes over and any reasonably intelligent concept seems impossibly out of reach. How do you begin? How do you organize your thoughts?

To help you through this process and to alleviate some of your anxiety, the WHS English Department decided to compile this writing handbook. Perhaps, we thought, if you are presented with a uniform approach to the writing process, you'll feel more confident in expressing your ideas. At least in the beginner phase, you won't have to make decisions about structure and strategy and can concentrate more fully on content. As you improve your writing skills, you can devise your own strategies and structures based upon the task at hand.

Although the analytical essay is only one mode of writing, we feel it transfers easily to a variety of subjects as a form of argumentation. Basic expository writing involves clear, focused thinking, mapping out arguments, and supporting them with strong evidence.

Any skill—from learning a musical instrument to becoming proficient in a sport—requires development of fundamental techniques and lots of practice. Writing is no different. The idea is to get you to write and *to write often!*

So, compose yourself and let's begin!

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STRUCTURING THE ESSAY

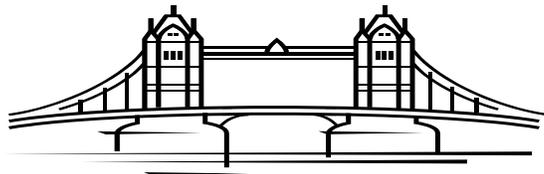
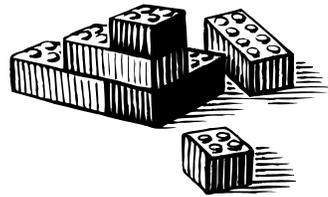
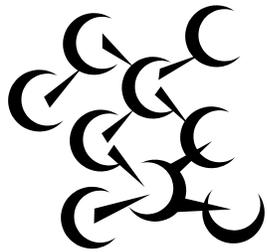


DIAGRAM OF AN ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Introduction

Interest-catching statement
Focusing/narrowing on true subject
Include name of work and author
Thesis statement

Body Paragraph 1

Body Thesis/Topic Sentence
Concrete details or examples
Quotes
Commentary
Concluding sentence

Body Paragraph 2

Body thesis/topic sentence
Concrete details or examples
Quotes
Commentary
Concluding sentence

Use the same format for additional Body Paragraphs

Conclusion

Summarize main ideas of the essay AND
give implications of main ideas, including the following:

- Making broader applications
- Adding further insight into essay's thesis
- Making a statement with emotional impact

TEN STEPS TO WRITING AN ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Step Activity

1. Choose a **topic**.
Example: Effects of pride in “The Scarlet Ibis”
2. Write a **focus question** which limits your topic.
Example: What are the effects of the narrator’s pride?
3. **Brainstorm** all possible answers to the focus question using such techniques as bubble clustering, outlining, or listing.
Example: See Brainstorming Diagram (p.6)
4. **Narrow** your brainstorming ideas to the number of body paragraphs that your essay will include.
Example: One body paragraph on negative effects of pride. One body paragraph of positive effects of pride.
5. Arrange these **main ideas** in order of increasing importance.
Example: Put positive effects first. Put negative effects last, since these have most impact on narrator.
6. Write a **thesis statement** that states the argument you will prove in your essay. It may take the form of 1) a multi-part statement or 2) a unified statement of opinion that does not list the main ideas.
Example: **Multi-part Statement:** Although the results of the narrator’s pride allow Doodle to enjoy some of the normal experiences of boyhood, that same pride contributes to the narrator’s guilt over his brother’s death. (This thesis states the specific topics of each body paragraph.

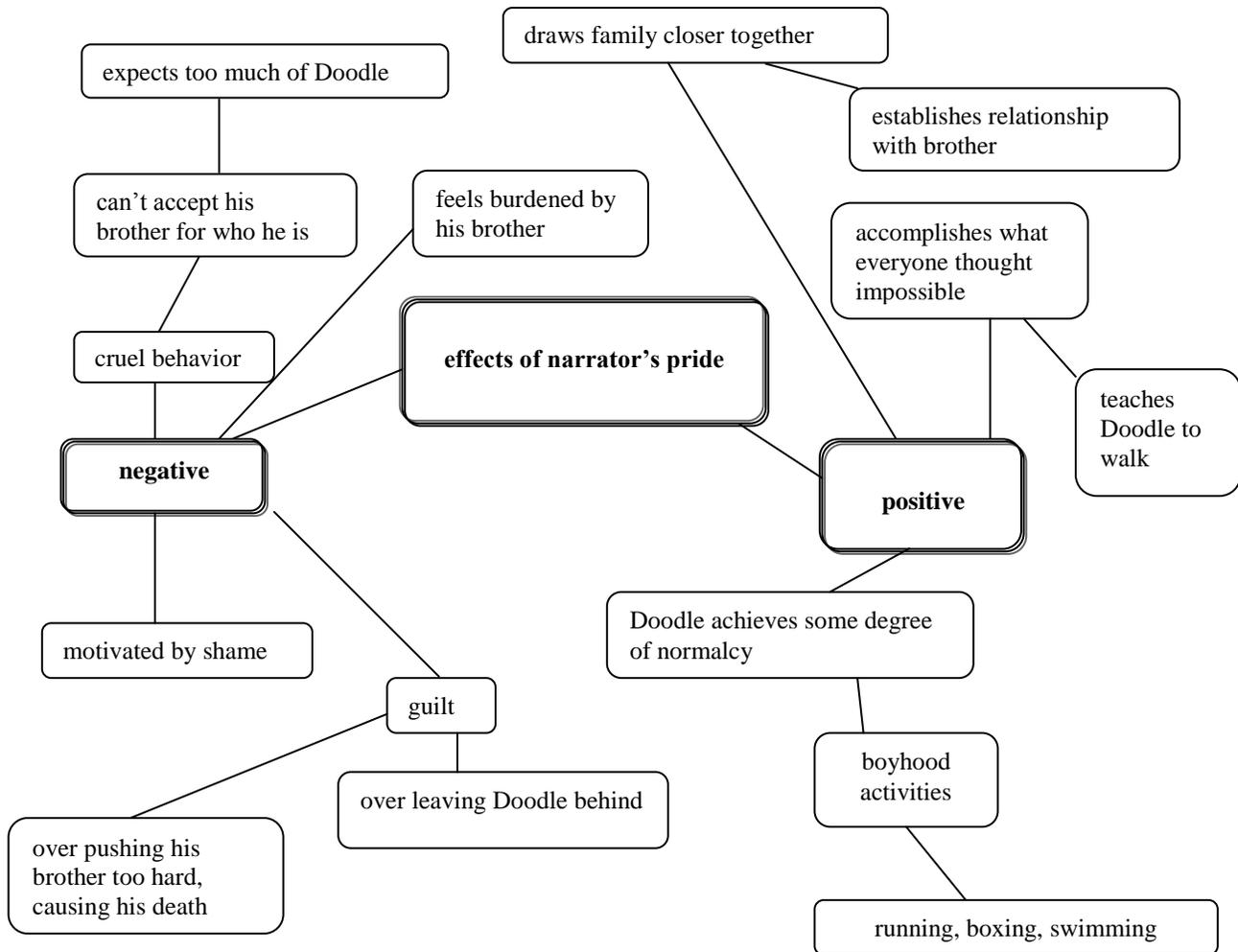
Unified Statement of Opinion: The narrator’s selfish motivation is stronger than his acceptance of his brother. (Notice that this thesis has the same idea, but does not echo the key words of the main idea nor state the specific points to be discussed.)

Step Activity

7. Write a brief **outline** which maps out the structure of your body paragraphs, with main ideas again in order of increasing importance.
- Example:*
- I. The positive results of narrator's pride
 - A. Enables Doodle to experience some sense of normalcy
 - B. Establishes close relationship between the brothers
 - C. Achieves accomplishment everyone said was impossible
 - II. The negative effects of narrator's pride
 - A. Can't accept brother as he is Resents brother and is cruel to him
 - B. Feels guilt over pushing his brother beyond his physical limits, causing his death
8. Write the **introduction**, beginning with a hook (interest catcher). Try using one of the opening formats illustrated on pages 16-17. Then link your hook to the main ideas in your thesis. As you gradually focus or narrow in on your true thesis, be sure to mention the **title** (properly punctuated) and **author**. Conclude your introduction with your **thesis statement**.
9. Write a **rough draft** of each body paragraph. Each body paragraph should begin with a clear topic sentence/body thesis which relates to the thesis statement. Be sure to follow your outline, developing with concrete details (including quotes) and commentary. End each body paragraph with a concluding statement.
10. Write the **conclusion** (see page 35). Begin with a sentence which states the **main idea** of your essay. Then you must go beyond a summary to **connect** your ideas to **broader issues** such as the implications or universal applications of those ideas, or further insight into the essay's thesis. In other words, you are going beyond your specific topic to link it to other situations. Conclude with a statement with emotional impact, perhaps a tie-in back to the hook of the introduction or an insight into what's at stake for all of us.

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is a must for writing a well-organized essay, for it is thinking on paper. You may choose from a variety of styles or formats, or make up one of your own, but you should find a way to get your ideas down on paper quickly before actually writing your essay. Common methods of brainstorming include the bubble cluster, outline, or list. The brainstorming for the example essay on “The Scarlet Ibis” might look like this:



Notice that the narrowed topic is centered, with two major categories of the narrator’s pride – negative and positive – identified. These categories, or main ideas, will form the basis of the two body paragraphs. Each main idea has several supporting details.

SAMPLE COVER PAGE

When a cover page is necessary or requested by your instructor, use the sample below as a template:

<p style="text-align: center;">The Vines of Pride</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Your Name</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Course Name Instructor's Name Due Date</p>

EXAMPLE OF AN ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Human pride is a complex emotion. On one hand, it is a necessary component of a healthy self-esteem. On the other hand, if it becomes excessive, it can have harmful effects on people's lives. Learning to give pride a balanced role in life is not always a simple task, especially for a child. In "The Scarlet Ibis," James Hurst explores the effects of pride in a young boy's life. Although the results of the narrator's pride allow Doodle to enjoy some of the normal experiences of boyhood, that same pride contributes to the narrator's guilt over his brother's death.

In some ways, the narrator's desire to have a brother like everyone else does impact Doodle positively. Doodle is able to leave his go-cart behind after his brother teaches him, with time and patience, to walk and then to run. Although the narrator's motives are selfish, Doodle gains confidence through his ability to function independently. Since carting his little brother around is no longer a chore, the narrator invites Doodle along on his adventures, even sharing "the only beauty" (170) he knows, Old Woman Swamp. Their activities, such as making necklaces and crowns, or spinning stories, bring the brothers closer together. Young as they are, together they are able to achieve an accomplishment that the adults thought impossible, for "nobody expects much from someone called Doodle" (170). Despite his shame over his selfish motives in teaching Doodle, the narrator cannot help being caught up in the praise and celebration of their accomplishment, as he waltzes his Aunt Nicey, who is "thanks praying in the doorway" (173) of the dining room. Because of his brother's efforts, Doodle's future seems to hold the promise of many such shared adventures.

Those same efforts, however, have some devastating effects for both their futures. At the outset, the narrator cannot accept his brother for who he is, thinking it "bad enough having an invalid brother" (169), so he makes plans to smother him with a pillow. Tired of the "long list of don'ts" (170) which make Doodle a burden, the narrator grows resentful of his handicapped

brother. The cruelty which results, such as making Doodle touch the coffin in which he was supposed to be buried, and threatening to leave Doodle alone, contributes to the growing guilt the narrator feels. This guilt is apparent when he admits, “There is within me (and with sadness I have watched it in others) a knot of cruelty borne by the stream of love, much as our blood sometimes bears the seed of our destruction” (170). As much as he loves his brother, and as much as he is aware of his own cruel actions, the narrator continues to push Doodle beyond his physical limitations. He makes his brother box, swim, and climb rope vines. Even on Doodle’s last day, he makes Doodle row back against the tide in the face of an impending storm. When Doodle falls, pleading, “Brother, Brother don’t leave me! Don’t leave me!” (176), the narrator leaves Doodle in the downpour, only to return to find his brother dead. Unfortunately, in the end, the narrator’s selfish motivation proves to be stronger than his acceptance of his handicapped brother.

Obviously, pride is not an absolute, simple emotion. The force of the narrator’s conflict is clear as he narrates the story of this troubled summer with such apparent remorse many years later. Looking back on his short time with Doodle, his insight is now tinged with guilt: “I did not know then that pride is a wonderful, terrible thing, a seed that bears two vines, life and death” (172). He now can see that his shame of having a brother who is not “normal” eclipsed his appreciation for Doodle’s exceptional qualities, such as his imagination. The project of helping Doodle produced both the excitement of seeing Doodle’s accomplishments as well as the seeds of the narrator’s enduring remorse. The fine line we all walk with pride requires balance; a selfish need for social acceptance can easily overrule the pride necessary for self-esteem. Like the narrator, we may atone too late, sheltering our own scarlet ibises from the storms we create.

WRITING THE INTRODUCTION



THESIS STATEMENTS

The first paragraph of your essay must get the reader's attention, introduce the subject of your essay, and bring focus to the topic. The key element of this introductory paragraph is the thesis statement, a sentence stating the subject and a focused opinion (commentary). Since your thesis statement is the single most important sentence of your essay, place it at the end of your introductory paragraph to give it the maximum impact.

Your thesis statement is crucial to your paper for three reasons:

1. It forces you to determine *exactly* what you're arguing before you write your essay.
2. It serves as an organizational contract between you and your reader.
3. It is your best marketing tool to sell your reader on the importance of your assertion.

Again, your thesis statement expresses a focused opinion, not a fact. Notice the difference in the sentences below:

Fact: Doodle is born with several handicaps.
Opinion: Everyone in Doodle's family except for his brother accepts Doodle's handicaps.

Although writing a good thesis is hard work, you should have a clear thesis statement before you begin writing your essay. Follow these pre-writing steps to turn an idea into an opinion that reflects an interesting and supportable argument:

1. Take your subject and narrow it according to the length of your essay.
Example: pride in "The Scarlet Ibis" → effect of the narrator's pride in "The Scarlet Ibis"
2. Formulate an opinion about that narrowed topic – take a stand. You can do this by completing the statement, "I shall argue that"
Example: I shall argue that the narrator's pride has both positive and negative effects.
3. Then ask *why* and *how* questions to further clarify your stand on the issue. Make sure you have sufficient evidence to support your answers.
Example: How does the narrator's pride show itself?
 Why does he push Doodle to be normal?
 How is what he does for Doodle in any way positive?
4. Form a thesis statement which asserts your opinion as a certainty (without using "I shall argue that," "I think," or "I believe") and includes the **significance or reasons**.
Example: Although the results of the narrator's pride allow Doodle to enjoy some of the normal experiences of boyhood, that same pride contributes to the narrator's guilt over his brother's death.

For an **analytical literature essay**, your thesis statement may take two forms:

1. **a multi-part statement:** states the specific ideas of each body paragraph
2. **a unified statement of opinion:** does not state the specific ideas of each body paragraph but does inform the reader of an opinion

Beginning writers often use the multi-part statement because it allows them to grasp more easily the organization of the essay. As you grow more proficient in your writing, you will use a unified statement of opinion, which emphasizes the **connection** between/among the main ideas.

Let's review our examples derived from James Hurst's short story, "The Scarlet Ibis." Remember that our topic was "the effects of pride." Try to find the subject and opinion/commentary in the following thesis statements:

A multi-part statement: *Although the results of the narrator's pride allow Doodle to enjoy some of the normal experiences of boyhood, that same pride contributes to the narrator's guilt over his brother's death.*

(This thesis states the specific ideas of each body paragraph.)

A unified statement of opinion: *The narrator's selfish motivation is stronger than his acceptance of his brother.*

(Notice that this thesis has the same idea, but does it not echo the key words of the main idea nor state the specific points to be discussed.)

Examples of thesis statements you should AVOID:

AVOID: The non-analytical thesis statement:

The narrator's pride serves an important purpose in "The Scarlet Ibis."

AVOID: The weak, insecure thesis statement:

I think that the narrator only pretends to be proud, but many critics think he is indeed prideful.

AVOID: The abstract generalization thesis statement:

"The Scarlet Ibis" is the greatest short story ever written.

AVOID: The empty and vague thesis statement:

The narrator's pride has significance in many ways.

AVOID: The simple listing thesis statement:

The narrator's pride has positive and negative effects.

AVOID: The non-arguable thesis statement:

Doodle's brother is ashamed of having a crippled brother.

TIPS FOR THE THESIS STATEMENT

- ✓ Make sure your thesis contains both a subject and an opinion (commentary). Remember that your thesis is your opinion about the subject of your essay.
- ✓ Place your thesis at the end of your introduction for the best impact.
- ✓ Write a thesis that is focused and arguable. Avoid factual comments.
 - Weak:** “The Scarlet Ibis” is a tragic short story which ends in the inevitable death of Doodle.
 - Improved:** Doodle’s death is inevitable in a society intolerant of weakness or uniqueness.
- ✓ Compress your thesis statement into one sentence if possible. If necessary, use a semicolon to connect two parts of the thesis into a unified whole.
- ✓ Do **not** use phrases such as “I think,” “I feel,” “In my opinion.” The reader already knows that your thesis statement reflects your opinion. In fact, using those phrases often gives the effect of uncertainty.
- ✓ State not only your assertion but also its **significance**.
- ✓ Avoid vague language. Make apparent your understanding of any terms or abstract language.
- ✓ Focus your thesis statement solely on the topics or issues you will discuss. Avoid sweeping generalizations.
- ✓ Do **not** phrase your thesis as a question. Questions imply a lack of confidence and suggest that you haven’t made up your own mind.
- ✓ Think of your thesis statement as a sales pitch. Sell your ideas as being an important component to the reader’s understanding of the subject.

Since writing an insightful thesis statement requires much thinking and revising, sometimes you may find a much stronger and more specific thesis statement later in your essay. It is acceptable to replace your original thesis with the better one and *make any necessary changes to your essay*. **Don’t be afraid of revision; the results are worth all the hard work!**

DIFFERENT WAYS TO BEGIN THE INTRODUCTION

Here are some common types of hooks used to write introductions. Use any one method (or a plan of your own choosing) to introduce your subject in an *engaging* manner to the reader. In the following sample introductions, the thesis statement is italicized.

1. Begin with a broad, general statement of your topic and narrow it down to your thesis statement.

Human pride is a complex emotion. On one hand, it is a necessary component of a healthy self-esteem. Yet on the other hand, if it becomes excessive, it can have harmful effects on people's lives. Learning to give pride a balanced role in life is not always a simple task, especially for a child. In James Hurst's "The Scarlet Ibis," he explores the effects of pride in a young boy's life. The story's narrator, Doodle's brother, confronts both the negative and positive effects of pride in his life.

2. Start with an idea or situation that is the opposite of one you will develop.

Pride is an emotion that often has negative connotations. It is closely associated with conceit or disdain. James Hurst explores this troublesome emotion in his story of two brothers, "The Scarlet Ibis." While Doodle's brother clearly pushes Doodle beyond his physical limits out of a sense of pride, this personal characteristic also brings about some positive outcomes. In several ways, Doodle's brother's pride ultimately provides Doodle with a quality of life that he would not have otherwise known.

3. Explain the importance of your topic to the reader.

James Hurst's story, "The Scarlet Ibis" is set against the backdrop of World War I, which plays a subtle but symbolic role in the story of two brothers in the American South. Just as the conflict in Europe is about suffering caused by men determined to reshape others in their own image, Doodle's brother refuses to accept the differences between himself and Doodle. The same pride that can bring about war causes Doodle's brother to insist that Doodle become like him, and the destructive effects are just as devastating as in war. In this story, events force Doodle's brother to confront the negative effects of his pride.

4. Use an incident or brief story. Professional writers often begin this way because the reader's attention is immediately engaged in a dramatic situation.

A father watches his young son swing the bat in his Little League game and puffs with pride as the boy rounds the bases after yet another homerun. He lavishes praise on his son who tries hard to please him. But the father expects so much of the boy, who finds it increasingly hard to meet those expectations. The boy knows a strikeout in the next game will evoke the father's anger and bitterness because his son's failure is somehow his own. The demanding attitude of such a father is similar to the feelings of the narrator for his disabled brother, Doodle, in "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst. Pride, which is sometimes tied to expectations for another, can often breed anger and resentment which destroy rather than build up.

5. Use a quotation.

The well-known admonition of the Bible, "Pride goeth before a fall," is one many can verify is true. The excesses of pride give men arrogance and disdain for others who are not like them that closes their hearts to tolerance and acceptance. James Hurst deals with the effects of pride in his story, "The Scarlet Ibis," which recounts the childhood of a boy and his disabled brother. Pride motivates Doodle's brother, the narrator of this mournful story, to help his brother overcome his disabilities. The results are at first gratifying and yet ultimately catastrophic, illustrating the dual nature of the effects of pride.

6. Begin with a startling fact or statistic.

According to the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, about 120,000 children are born in the United States each year with a physical or mental disability. These children's difficulties in life will be many, and their stories have often been told. How their families relate to, are affected by, or are able to accept the disabled individual is a story less often told. In James Hurst's story, "The Scarlet Ibis," he examines the way a young boy deals with his disabled brother, Doodle. The narrator struggles with his pride, which demands that his brother be "normal," only to discover the devastating effects of such pride. On the other hand, it is the narrator's pride that offers Doodle a quality of life that he would not have otherwise achieved. The narrator struggles with the paradox that pride can be both terrible and wonderful.

BEGINNINGS TO AVOID

These openers are weak because they are trite, overused, unexciting, or inappropriate for an introduction to an analytical essay.

- **Dictionary Definitions**
A disability, according to Webster, . . .
- **Plot Summary**
“The Scarlet Ibis” is the story of a boy who is upset when his brother is born handicapped. He even considers smothering him at first. The doctors do not give Doodle much of a life expectancy. His parents have a coffin built for him.
- **Irrelevant Historical or Biographical Resume**
James Hurst, author of the short story, “The Scarlet Ibis” was once a banker in New York, but he later became a writer when he returned to the South where he was born in 1922.
- **Common Knowledge or Platitude**
Birds come in all sizes and colors. Red birds can be found in America, but some are exotic and are generally only found in other countries.
- **Overly Formal Statement**
An argument that has been put forth by many a child is that he or she should not have to be responsible for the well-being of his/her younger sibling.
- **Questions**
What is it like to lose a sibling when you are still a child yourself? What is it like when you feel responsible for that sibling’s death? How could you ever forgive yourself?
- **Apologies**
Even for an expert in literature who is an avid reader, analyzing “The Scarlet Ibis” would be a daunting task. The story is so difficult to read, so long, and so filled with symbolism that comprehending it is nearly overwhelming.
- **Reference to the Process of Reading**
When reading “The Scarlet Ibis” by James Hurst, the reader first notices the imagery and vivid descriptions. After turning the pages, the reader begins to feel a part of the world of Doodle and his brother.

Remember: Begin immediately with something connected with the literary work, **directly related to the main idea of your thesis.** Too general of a beginning makes it impossible for you to narrow in on your thesis within a paragraph. Make your opener grab your audience’s attention by being fresh and interesting or provocative.

WRITING BODY PARAGRAPHS



STRUCTURE OF THE BODY PARAGRAPH

<p>In some ways, the narrator’s desire to have a brother like everyone else does impact Doodle positively. Doodle is able to leave his go-cart behind after his brother teaches him, with time and patience, to walk and then to run. Although the narrator’s motives are selfish, Doodle gains confidence through his ability to function independently. Since carting his little brother around is no longer a chore, the narrator invites Doodle along on his adventures, even sharing “the only beauty” (170) he knows, Old Woman Swamp. Their activities, such as making necklaces and crowns, or spinning stories, bring the brothers closer together. Young as they are, together they are able to achieve an accomplishment that the adults thought impossible, for “nobody expects much from someone called Doodle” (170). Despite his shame over his selfish motives in teaching Doodle, the narrator cannot help being caught up in the praise and celebration of their accomplishment, as he waltzes his Aunt Nicey, who is “thanks praying in the doorway” (173) of the dining room. Because of his brother’s efforts, Doodle’s future seems to hold the promise of many such shared adventures.</p>	<p>topic sentence / body thesis (BTS)</p> <p>concrete detail</p> <p>commentary</p> <p>commentary w/concrete detail</p> <p>concrete detail w/commentary</p> <p>commentary w/concrete detail</p> <p>commentary w/concrete detail</p> <p>concluding sentence (all commentary)</p>
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TOPIC SENTENCES/BODY THESIS SENTENCES

Your topic sentence should function as an umbrella statement that covers every detail to be discussed in this paragraph. The topic sentence addresses one component of your essay's thesis, and, in this way, it functions as a thesis statement for its own paragraph.

In addition to holding each paragraph together, topic sentences should link each paragraph to the thesis of your essay. The easiest way to make this connection is to write your topic sentences with occasional references to key words and ideas from your thesis statement.

Example:

Thesis statement: Although the results of the narrator's pride allow Doodle to *enjoy some of the normal experiences* of boyhood, that same pride contributes to the narrator's *guilt over his brother's death*.

Topic Sentence (Body paragraph #1): In some ways, the narrator's desire to have a brother like everyone else does impact Doodle *positively*.

Topic Sentence (Body paragraph #2): Those same efforts, however, have some *devastating effects* for both their futures.

It is clear from the topic sentences that body paragraph #1 will discuss the positive effects of the narrator's pride, while body paragraph #2 will discuss the negative effects. You can see the connections, which are italicized for you. Your topic sentences keep the main ideas of the thesis statement threaded through the essay. They should also be arguments, not factual detail.

Topic Sentence: Without the narrator's efforts, Doodle would not have enjoyed a meaningful life.

Factual Detail: The narrator shared his world with Doodle.

Notice how the factual detail sentence has no argument and therefore cannot signal the main idea of the body paragraph. It is much too limited.

Transitions in your topic sentences can help keep your essay fluent and logical.

So remember:

- Topic sentences reflect a main component of your thesis statement.
- A topic sentence should be an argument that your body paragraph will prove.

CONCRETE DETAIL

The most convincing body paragraphs use specific and strong examples for support of the topic sentence/body thesis.

Concrete details are such things as **what characters say or do, what characters think, what the author says about his/her characters,** or any **detail of description or action** that helps prove that your topic sentence is true. In any case, it must be as **specific**, or **concrete**, as possible.

Example: Sometimes the narrator accidentally turns Doodle over in the go-cart.

This concrete detail has been paraphrased from the actual words of the story. Sometimes a concrete detail is worded in such a way that it should be quoted exactly (see **Quotations** on the following page).

Concrete details support your reasons for why your body thesis is true. Therefore, you should select them carefully and order them within each paragraph from least to most important.

Do not give more than one concrete detail without explaining your first example through **commentary**.

Showing vs. Telling

Avoid the temptation to make generalizations rather than incorporate concrete detail. All claims you make need concrete details as supporting evidence. Thus, it would not be appropriate to say “Doodle’s brother was sometimes careless about Doodle’s welfare” without proof, such as in the example above: “Sometimes the narrator accidentally turns Doodle over in the go-cart.” This sentence **shows** that your claim is true.

It takes a close reading of your text to find the appropriate concrete details, but they are essential for a strong essay.

Some Helpful Words to Introduce Concrete Detail:

For example
 For instance
 This is evident when
 Because
 Since

QUOTATIONS

Quotations are an important and authoritative source of **concrete details** in an essay about literature. You must include **at least one as support in every body paragraph** of your essay. Using quotations well, however, can be tricky. Remember the following general guidelines:

- Quote the words **exactly** from the text.
- Use only **significant** quotations – when only the exact wording will do. Otherwise, paraphrase.

Avoid: Being the first to see the scarlet ibis, Doodle calls out to the family, “It’s a great big red bird!” (174). [Does this quote seem to offer important information to you?]
- **Connect** the quotation to your words/comments in the essay. **Never** use self-contained quotations – that is, quotes that stand all by themselves, disconnected from sentences before or after the quotation.

Avoid: Disappointment causes the narrator to cruelly ignore Doodle’s plea as they run through the storm. “Brother, Brother, don’t leave me! Don’t leave me!” (176). The narrator wants to punish his brother for his failure.

Improved: Disappointed by his brother’s failure to reach the goals, the narrator attempts to punish him as they run through the storm by cruelly ignoring Doodle, who pleads, “Brother, Brother, don’t leave me! Don’t leave me!” (176).
- Your commentary about the quotation might include the following:
 - the identification of the speaker
 - identification of the person being addressed
 - brief context/background plot information
 - commentary/analysis

Avoid: Feeling resentful, the narrator admits, “Sometimes I accidentally turned him over, but he never told Mama” (170). [This is unclear because the reader does not know why the narrator is resentful, who is turned over, or how the narrator “turned him over.”]

Improved: Resenting the loss of his own independence [*commentary*] when required to haul Doodle around everywhere he went [*brief context*], the narrator [*speaker identification*] admits, “Sometimes I accidentally turned him over, but he never told Mama” (170).
- Use **appropriate** quotations for your comments. Search for quotations that particularly highlight/support your statements, like the one above.
- Use only the most significant portions of the material you would like to quote. In that way you will find it easier to connect the quotation to your own commentary (see examples in the first body paragraph of the sample essay on page 8).

- Cite the page number where you found the quotation in the literary work, by placing it after the quote in parentheses. If a quotation begins at the end of one page and continues on to the following page, note it in the following manner: (12-13).
- Write quotations **no longer than three typewritten lines**, as this is in proportion to the shorter length essays that most of your English teachers will assign.
- Keep quotations within the text of your essay. Do not set them off with special type or indentations. Do not single space quotes.

PLACEMENT OF QUOTATIONS IN AN ESSAY

Introductory Paragraph:

- In general, you should not use quotes from the literary work being analyzed in this paragraph, as they are typically used in body paragraphs for support.
- Quotes relating to the essay's subject may introduce this paragraph.

Body Paragraphs:

- You must include **at least** one quotation in each body paragraph to provide evidence for your commentary/analytical statements.
- In general, you should not use a quote in a paragraph's topic sentence or concluding sentence, since these should be commentary.
- Do **not** use one-word or two-word quotes, as they are often meaningless.

Avoid: The narrator recognizes his own cruelty when he takes Doodle to the barn loft to show him the "mahogany box" (172) that their father had a carpenter build shortly after his birth.

Concluding Paragraph:

- As a general recommendation, you should not use more than one quote in the entire paragraph, and preferably not in the restated thesis.
- Here the quote can be from the literary work or an outside source.
- It is best to finish your conclusion with your own commentary to give authority to the significance of your argument.

TYPES OF QUOTATIONS

Character Quotations

What they are:

- The quoted words are the actual spoken words or thoughts of a character from the work, used to prove an argument you are making.
- The quotation itself must be a **complete sentence**, connected to your words/comments.
- You must **name the character speaking** when using this type of quotation, avoiding the overuse of the word “says.” (See page 49 of the essay packet for alternative word choices.)

Avoid: When Aunt Nicey *says*, “Dead birds is bad luck” (175), she introduces a sense of foreboding.

Improved: When Aunt Nicey *remarks*, “Dead birds is bad luck” (175), she introduces a sense of foreboding.

Where to place and how to punctuate them:

- In the middle of the sentence:

Example: Each time his mother cries out, “Take Doodle with you” (170), the narrator’s resentment grows because he views his brother as an unfair burden.

Example: After seeing Doodle’s sensitive reaction to the beauty of Old Woman Swamp, the narrator remarks with irritation, “For heaven’s sake, what’s the matter?” (170), interpreting his tears as yet another sign of weakness in his brother.

- At the end of the sentence:

Example: Viewing his brother as an unfair burden on him, the narrator’s resentment grows each time the mother cries out, “Take Doodle with you” (170).

Example: After seeing Doodle’s sensitive reaction to the beauty of Old Woman Swamp, the narrator quickly interprets his tears as yet another sign of weakness in his brother when he remarks, “For heaven’s sake, what’s the matter?” (170).

- At the beginning of the sentence:

Avoid this position, as it is usually awkward and abrupt for the reader.

TYPES OF QUOTATIONS

Tuck-in Quotations

What they are:

- The quoted words/phrases are tucked in/folded into/blended into/inserted into your sentence.
- The quoted words become an **essential, absolutely necessary part** of your sentence.
- The quoted words/phrases **cannot be taken out** of your sentence because then it would not make sense.
- Tuck-in quotations should **NOT** include 1st or 2nd person pronouns.

Awkward: After the death of his brother, which occurs in a moment of purposeful neglect, the distressed narrator attempts to protect “my fallen scarlet ibis from the heresy of rain” (176).

Improved: After the death of his brother which occurs in a moment of purposeful neglect, the distressed narrator attempts to protect his “fallen scarlet ibis from the heresy of rain” (176).

- Do not place tuck-in quotes back-to-back.
- **The majority of quotations you use in your essay should be of the tuck-in variety.**

Where to place and how to punctuate them:

- In the middle of the sentence:

Example: Although the narrator resents that his brother does not provide the relationship he longs for in a sibling, he discovers when they play together in Old Woman Swamp that they are “beyond the touch of the everyday world” (170) where those traditional ideas matter. Here they co-exist in a world of fantasy and beauty.

- At the end of the sentence:

Example: The opening lines of the story seem to foreshadow the death of Doodle with the mention of the empty bird’s nest outside his home which “rocked back and forth like an empty cradle” (169).

- At the beginning of the sentence:

Avoid this position, as it is usually awkward and abrupt for the reader.

ADDITIONAL PUNCTUATION DEVICES

Question Marks (?) and Exclamation Points(!):

- When a character quote has as its end mark a question mark or exclamation point, you must include that punctuation **inside** of the quotation marks.
- After the end quote marks, place the page number where you can find the quotation in the literary work in parentheses.
- Follow the page number with the comma or period needed to continue or complete your sentence.

Example: After seeing Doodle’s sensitive reaction to the beauty of Old Woman Swamp, the narrator remarks with irritation, “For heaven’s sake, what’s the matter?” (170), interpreting his tears as yet another sign of weakness his brother.

Example: After seeing Doodle’s sensitive reaction to the beauty of Old Woman Swamp, the narrator remarks with irritation, “For heaven’s sake, what’s the matter?” (170).

Ellipsis Marks (...):

- The best quotes avoid ellipsis marks altogether.
- You use this punctuation to shorten the quote by deleting a word or phrase and substituting the ellipsis marks (...) instead. Of course, the remaining quote must fit smoothly in with your own sentence.
- You should rarely use the ellipsis marks at the beginning or end of a tuck-in quote.

Brackets []:

- Indicate that you are altering a quotation by placing the brackets ([]) around the word(s) that you have substituted in place of the author’s original word(s). A common use is to change the author’s past-tense verb into present tense to flow with your present-tense commentary.

Awkward: The fact that the narrator needs to “**ran** into the house and **brought** back the bird book” (175) accentuates the notion that just as Doodle’s physical handicaps make him an awkward fit in his human environment so **is** the scarlet ibis alien to North Carolina.

With Brackets: The fact that the narrator needs to “[**run**] into the house and [**bring**] back the bird book” (175) accentuates the notion that just as Doodle’s physical handicaps make him an awkward fit in his human environment, so **is** the scarlet ibis alien to North Carolina.

- You might occasionally use this technique to change the author’s selected pronoun that does not work logically in your sentence.

Awkward: Distressed by the death of his brother, which occurs in a moment of purposeful neglect, he repents while “sheltering *my* fallen scarlet ibis from the heresy of rain” (176).

Improved: Distressed by the death of his brother, which occurs in a moment of purposeful neglect, he repents while “sheltering *[his]* fallen scarlet ibis from the heresy of rain” (176).

- ***The best quotes avoid brackets altogether.*** Search for an alternative wording. Sometimes it is best to paraphrase:

The need to consult a bird book to identify the red creature perching in the tree accentuates the notion that just as Doodle’s physical handicaps make him an awkward fit in his human environment, so is the scarlet ibis alien to North Carolina.

Poetic Slash Mark (/):

You will indicate the end of each line of poetry which you are quoting with the slash mark (/). Retain the capitalization and any punctuation the author uses within the quotation.

Original Text: Juliet: I’ll look to like, if looking liking move;
But no more deep will I endart mine eye
Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.

Example: When Juliet’s mother asks if she might be interested in marrying a particular gentleman who will attend the ball that night, Juliet demonstrates her desire to please her parents as she responds, “I’ll look to like, if looking liking move;/But no more deep will I endart mine eye/Than your consent gives strength to make it fly” (1.3.97-99).

Drama Citations:

Plays written in prose, such as *The Crucible*, follow the usual guidelines for the citation of quotations. Plays written in verse, however, such as *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, require different citation. Omit page numbers when citing classic drama. Instead, cite by textual division (Act. scene. line) with periods or commas separating the divisions. For the Act and scene, use Arabic numerals or Roman numerals in upper case for Act; Arabic numerals or lower case Roman numerals for scene. Line numbers are written with Arabic numerals.

So, if you are using a quote which appears in Act I, scene 3, lines 97-99 as appears in the above example, you will indicate that as **(1.3.97-99)** or **(I.iii.97-99)**.

Here’s a review of Roman numerals: I, II, III, IV, V or i, ii, iii, iv, v

COMMENTARY

Commentary is your explanation or discussion of the concrete details you have selected to support the basic thesis argument of your essay. You need to make sure your reader understands how each concrete detail relates to your main thesis as well as to the main idea of your body paragraph. In other words, your commentary connects your concrete detail to the main argument of your essay; it is how you persuade the reader that your thesis is true.

Concrete detail: Sometimes the narrator accidentally turns Doodle over in the go-cart.

Commentary: Tired of having to watch Doodle every day, the narrator is at times irresponsible about his brother's welfare. Although the narrator does not want to physically harm Doodle, his growing resentment of having a brother for whom he must constantly care is apparent.

How much commentary should you have in your body paragraphs?

You should aim for **two parts commentary to one part detail**. In other words, there are two points of commentary for each detail, example, or quote.

Commentary is difficult because all the thoughts must come from you! You have to write your own opinion, interpretation, insight, analysis, explanation, evaluation, reflection, or discussion about a detail from the story. When you write commentary, you are “commenting” on a point you have made, always in reference to the focus of your thesis sentence.

Be careful when writing commentary:

- It is **not** a simple listing or restating of facts or details from a work.
- It is **not** a summary of the plot.
Imagine that your reader has read the same literary work but does not understand the meaning of the work as well as you do! You are explaining and analyzing its **meaning**. You are not telling what happened in the story but **why** it happened or how it is significant.

Example of a plot summary with NO commentary:

When they reach the shore, Doodle collapses in the mud from fatigue; with the help of the narrator, however, he manages to get up and start for home. He tries to keep up with his brother but falls behind and dies underneath a red nightshade bush.

After reading this plot summary, the reader cannot help but wonder, “So what? What is the **meaning** of it all?”

- Do not misstate facts/details to fit an interpretation.

For example, let's say that you are discussing the negative effects of pride in the story. You find a concrete detail to support your thesis such as the narrator making plans to kill Doodle by smothering him with a pillow. In your commentary, however, you do not explain how this detail relates to the negative effects of pride; instead, your commentary focuses on the narrator's homicidal tendencies.

- If commentary does not lead the reader to an understanding of the thesis, it is irrelevant and/or incoherent.

To write a body paragraph with clear, insightful commentary, look at your concrete details and **draw reasoned analytical conclusions** from them by making it clear to your reader **how they connect to the main idea** of your paragraph.

Example of Concrete Details with Commentary (commentary is italicized):

The narrator's pride prevents him from accepting his brother's weakness and blinds him to the desperate reality of Doodle's condition. After the narrator makes his brother row back against the tide in the face of an impending storm, Doodle collapses in the mud. *He is exhausted from his day of exertion and knows that he has disappointed his brother. Frightened by the impending storm,* however, he gets up and starts for home, begging his brother not to leave him. He tries to keep up with the narrator but falls behind, *too exhausted to run; the day's strenuous activities prove to be too much for him. The narrator, disappointed in Doodle's physical performance and unwilling to recognize the medical warning signs of Doodle's condition,* continues to run faster. When he returns to find Doodle huddled on the ground, dead under the red nightshade bush, *he begins to understand that his desire to make Doodle a "normal" boy has, in fact, contributed to his brother's death. In the end, the narrator's selfish pride proves to be stronger than his acceptance of his handicapped brother.*

Notice how the commentary draws from the concrete details and supports the argument presented by the topic sentence. Explicitly stating your ideas and interpretations will help drive your point home.

You can vary the position of the commentary for each concrete detail by placing it before, after, or in the same sentence as the detail. The two points of commentary can be two separate ideas or one idea taken further. Reread the above paragraph for examples of each.

CONCLUDING SENTENCES

Once you have adequately explained and interpreted your concrete details through commentary, be sure to end your body paragraph with an appropriate **concluding sentence**. This sentence is a **summary statement** of the paragraph.

The concluding sentence often begins with a transition, such as the words or phrases below:

In effect
 In other words
 Under the circumstances
 Essentially
 In essence
 Thus
 Therefore
 As a result
 Hence
 Consequently
 Clearly
 Accordingly
 For this reason
 It follows that

The concluding sentence does *not* merely duplicate the topic sentence of the paragraph in thought or language. It comes to a conclusion about the main idea.

Examples (*from body paragraphs in sample essay on page 8*):

Topic sentence: In some ways, the narrator’s desire to have a normal brother like everyone else does impact Doodle positively.

Concluding Sentence: Because of his brother’s effort, Doodle’s future seems to hold the promise of many such adventures.

Topic sentence: Those same efforts, however, have some devastating effects for both their futures.

Concluding sentence: Unfortunately, in the end, the narrator’s selfish motivation proves to be stronger than his acceptance of his handicapped brother.

Notice how the concluding sentence in each example seems to **clarify or solidify the main idea** in the topic sentence. The topic sentence opens up; the concluding sentence closes.

WRITING THE CONCLUSION



CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

The concluding paragraph should do just that—**conclude**. You may feel you have just finished saying all you can possibly say in the body of your essay. No essay, however, is complete without drawing some conclusions from the thesis, which you so painstakingly have proven is true. Take the following steps to write your conclusion:

1. *Bring the main point of your essay into sharp focus.*

To do this, you may begin with a summary of the main points of the essay or a re-worded statement of your thesis. Compare the sample sentences below:

Thesis statement: The narrator’s pride has both a positive and negative effect in this story.

Re-statement for conclusion:

Doodle’s brother’s pride seems to bring about positive changes for Doodle, but ultimately this pride causes Doodle’s death and, with it, a lifetime of guilt for his brother.

2. *Gratify your reader with at least one NEW idea.*

First, re-read your essay. The thesis you have chosen should have strong support. Then ask yourself any of the questions that follow in order to decide what this new idea should be.

- What is the significance of my thesis?
- What are the implications of my thesis?
- What broader application does my thesis have to life in general? To other situations? To the underlying theme? To the meaning of the title?
- What further insight do I now have into my thesis?
- What meaning has the author imparted that can be realized as a result of examining the work through the lens that focused on my thesis?
- How can I extend my original thesis to incorporate some larger significance?

Example:

The final words of the story reveal that, in retrospect, the narrator realizes that he did to Doodle what nature did to the scarlet ibis. When he sheltered his “fallen scarlet ibis from the heresy of rain” (176), he recognized his own love and respect for Doodle, as well as the intractable pride that made him place fatally harsh demands on Doodle. Years later he confronts the duality of his pride which helped Doodle progress far beyond any expectations others had for his life. It bonded the brothers who were so disparate, but it also pushed aside his compassion and tolerance, replacing them with unrealistic expectations and cruelty.

[The shifts in verb tense show the present contemplation of past actions.]

3. *Give your ending emotional impact. Conclude with a striking statement.*

This statement could be a **true conclusion** drawn from the rest of this paragraph, a **broader implication** of the subject, an **opinion** based on the previous discussion, a **prediction** or forecast, an **apt quotation**, a **final statement of the meaning** of the story or its **title**.

Example:

Ultimately, this is a story of sin and remorse. Doodle's brother is writing a confession that he both loved and hated his brother, and that his pride enriched Doodle's life just as it caused his death. Recognizing and admitting his fault is the first step toward finally forgiving himself for being nothing more than we all are, human.

Here's the conclusion in its entirety from the examples above:

Doodle's brother's pride seems to bring about positive changes for Doodle, but ultimately this pride causes Doodle's death and, with it, a lifetime of guilt for his brother. The final words of the story reveal that, in retrospect, the narrator realizes that he did to Doodle what nature did to the scarlet ibis. When he sheltered his "fallen scarlet ibis from the heresy of rain" (176), he recognized his own love and respect for Doodle, as well as the intractable pride that made him place fatally harsh demands on Doodle. Years later he confronts the duality of his pride which helped Doodle progress far beyond any expectations others had for his life. It bonded the brothers who were so disparate, but it also pushed aside his compassion and tolerance, replacing them with unrealistic expectations and cruelty. Ultimately, this is a story of sin and remorse. Doodle's brother is writing a confession that he both loved and hated his brother, and that his pride enriched Doodle's life just as it caused his death. Recognizing and admitting his fault is the first step toward finally forgiving himself for being nothing more than we all are, human.

For another example, look again at the conclusion in the sample essay on page 9. Try to locate the different sections within it.

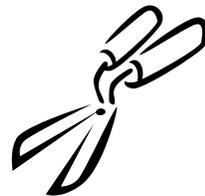
Some other ways to conclude:

- With a concluding opinion that grows from and reflects the preceding evidence:
A balance between selfish and healthy pride is difficult to achieve but necessary if we are to live in society.
- With a speculative statement that leaves the subject open for further thought:
Perhaps Doodle's brother is no guiltier than any of us, for who has never stepped over the boundary between pride and selfishness.
- With a return to the problem or image in the introductory paragraph so that the essay has a rounded effect:
James Hurst has explored the dual nature of pride as a quest into the dual nature of all men, seeking the answer to the fundamental question of man's innate propensity for good and evil.
- With an ironic or unexpected turn of thought:
Perhaps it was simply Doodle's time to die, and his brother has taken on guilt for an event he did not actually cause.
- With an appropriate anecdote that illustrates your main idea:
Cain slew his brother Abel out of envy, and then avoided admitting his guilt, telling God, "Am I my brother's keeper?"
- With a brief, easily recognizable quote that emphasizes your idea:
Once the narrator equates Doodle to his "fallen scarlet ibis" (176), he understands Doodle's puzzling compassion for the dead bird in their yard.
- With a reference to a literary parallel, a brief comparison to another work of literature that reflects the same idea or theme:
Similarly, in de Maupassant's short story "The Necklace," Mathilde Loisel suffers for many years before the guilt over the consequences of her excessive pride can be expiated.

DO NOT:

- Simply restate the thesis and main points of your essay
- Globalize or make generalizations that extend far beyond the limits of your argument
- Leave your reader with unanswered questions
- Ask pointless questions
- Throw in random ideas that you did not discuss in the body of the paper
- Make apologies
- Make melodramatic statements
- Use hyperbole

REVISING AND EDITING



TRANSITIONS

Transitions are merely connections between sentences or paragraphs, and their purpose is to help the reader follow the writer's line of thought. The writer uses them to progress *smoothly* from one idea to the next.

There are two types of transitional devices: standard devices and paragraph hooks. Experienced writers use them in combination.

Standard Devices

- Used for pro and con arguments (*e.g.* true, admittedly, obviously, nevertheless)
- Show shifting of point of view (*e.g.* furthermore, however, instead)
- Reflect emphasis (*e.g.* in fact, indeed, undoubtedly)
- See pages 43-44 for more examples

Paragraph Hooks

Use these for subtler and stronger control of your essay:

- **Word hook:**
Hook the last word (or short phrase) of the preceding paragraph into the first sentence of the next paragraph.
- **Deeper hook:**
Hook any of the words of the last sentence of the previous paragraph into the first sentence of the next paragraph.
- **Multiple hook:**
Repeat one or two key words from deeper into the preceding paragraph (but do not insult the reader with obvious repetition).
- **Idea hook:**
Repeat an idea rather than an exact word or phrase (paraphrase).

Remember: The best transitional device is a **logically ordered argument** with proper **emphasis of your major points**. Support the progression of your ideas with the **appropriate essay structure**.

To see how these transitions work, let's look at the first body paragraph from our example essay, as well as the first sentence of the second body paragraph. The standard devices are in bold; the *paragraph hooks* are italicized.

In some ways, the narrator's desire to have a brother like everyone else does impact Doodle positively. Doodle is able to leave his go-cart behind after his brother teaches him, with time and patience, to walk and then to run. **Although** the narrator's motives are selfish, Doodle gains confidence through his ability to function independently. **Since** carting his little brother around is no longer a chore, the narrator invites Doodle along on his adventures, even sharing "the only beauty" (170) he knows, Old Woman Swamp. Their activities, such as making necklaces and crowns, or spinning stories, bring the brothers closer together. Young as they are, together they are able to achieve an accomplishment that the adults thought impossible, for "nobody expects much from someone called Doodle" (170). **Despite** his shame over his *selfish motives* in teaching Doodle, the narrator cannot help being caught up in the praise and celebration of their accomplishment, as he waltzes his Aunt Nicey, who is "thanks praying in the doorway" (173) of the dining room. **Because of** his brother's *efforts*, Doodle's *future* seems to hold the promise of many such shared adventures.

Those same efforts, however, have some devastating effects for both their *futures*.

The words *efforts* and *futures* in the topic sentence of the second body paragraph echo the same words from the last sentence of the first body paragraph. This is an example of a deeper paragraph hook.

Here are examples of the other types of paragraph hooks, substituted for the topic sentence of the second body paragraph:

Word hook: These *adventures* come to a tragic end when the narrator's program to make Doodle like other boys fails.

Multiple hook: Unfortunately, the narrator's *desire* to have a normal brother also has a devastating *impact* on both brothers.

Idea hook: This *optimism*, however, fades when the approach of fall signals the failure of the narrator's program.

What phrase does the idea hook *optimism* echo? See if you can locate each hook in the first body paragraph.

Notice the standard devices used together with paragraph hooks. Use a variety of combinations of both devices, but don't overload your paragraphs. Notice also transitions of both kinds used between sentences within the body paragraphs to help guide the reader through the main points and examples. Use these also, but again, don't overdo it.

COMMON TRANSITIONS: STANDARD DEVICES

1. *To indicate addition or another point:**

also	besides	moreover	then again	in the next place
furthermore	of course	lastly	to begin with	in a like manner
finally	in addition	next	at the outset	equally important
then	another	in short	in other words	as has been noted
after that	in brief	as might be expected		

2. *To indicate another time:*

next	at length	then	finally	beforehand	immediately
soon	meanwhile	later	previously	afterward	not long after

3. *To indicate results, causes, or purpose:*

therefore	hence	for this reason	whereupon	as might be expected
consequently	thus	as a result	accordingly	

4. *To show contrast:*

conversely	however**	nevertheless	provided that	on the other hand
in spite of	although	otherwise	still	notwithstanding
even if	instead	even so yet	despite	on the contrary

5. *To indicate comparison:*

similarly	as an example	for instance	likewise
comparably	in comparison	even so	in like manner

6. *To indicate place:*

here	adjacently	end to end	on the opposite side	in this area
there	nearby	in this spot	in this location	juxtaposed

7. **Turn signals:** Alert the reader that he is about to read a different view, an opposing idea, or a change in the direction of the discussion.

yet	on the contrary	on the other hand	despite
meanwhile	nevertheless	in spite of	conversely
otherwise	notwithstanding	although	however**

8. **Stop signals:** Convey that special attention should be paid to what follows because it is significant.

undoubtedly	without a question	unquestionably
hereafter	without a doubt	by far
significantly	without precedent	most assuredly

9. **Relationship signals:** Specify the type of relationship.

Time:	Space:	Cause & Effect:	Degree:	Condition:
finally	beside	because	above all	if
while	there	since	many	unless
when	here	so	less	though
soon		that		

* Avoid using *in conclusion*, *to sum up*, *first(ly)*, *second(ly)*, etc. These are commonplace, overused, and weak.

** Be careful when using *however* in the beginning of a sentence, as you may be in danger of writing a fragment rather than a complete sentence. This word usually joins two sentences.

VERB TENSE

Verbs can change their form to show present, past, and future time periods; for example, the verb *like* has the following tenses:

Present:	he likes
Past:	he liked
Future:	he will like
Present perfect:	he has liked
Past perfect:	he had liked
Future perfect:	he will have liked

Believe it or not, selecting and staying with an appropriate verb tense can be somewhat of a problem, especially when you're mixing *your* words with those of the author of the literary work you are analyzing. Switching back and forth among present, past and future can completely confuse your reader, so we suggest you make it easy on everybody and ***stay with the present tense*** for all main verbs. You might be tempted to use the past tense because your reading of the work and the action of the story are already finished, but using the present tense is a far better choice because it keeps your analysis "alive" and meaningful.

The consistent use of the present tense actually makes your job as a writer easier. Here's an example of the kind of decisions you might have to make if you decide to write in past tense:

<i>Problematic:</i> (Past Tense)	Once the narrator decided [had decided?] he would teach Doodle to walk, he would take [took?] him into Old Woman Swamp and practice [practiced? would practice?] with him until Doodle was exhausted [would be exhausted?].
<i>More Effective:</i> (Present Tense)	Once the narrator decides to teach Doodle to walk, he takes him into Old Woman Swamp and practices with him until Doodle is exhausted.

See how much easier present tense is?

ACTIVE/PASSIVE VOICE

The English language has two *voices*—active and passive. What those words really refer to is the action or lack of action of the subject of the sentence. When the subject is doing the action, as in “The shark bit deeply into the exposed leg of the hapless surfer,” that’s the active voice. When the subject is being acted upon, as in “The exposed leg of the hapless surfer was deeply bitten by the shark,” that’s passive voice.

It doesn’t take a professional stylist to see that the first sentence about the surfer and the shark is quite a bit more powerful than the second is. Active voice generally tends to have a greater impact because it keeps the reader focused on the action and forces the writer to consider using livelier verbs. Another benefit is that it almost always uses fewer words than the passive.

Let’s take a look at some of the advantages of choosing the active voice over the passive.

Active voice: After Daddy builds a go-cart for Doodle, the narrator reluctantly drags Doodle everywhere he goes.

Passive voice: After a go-cart is built for Doodle by Daddy, he is reluctantly dragged around by the narrator everywhere he goes.

Using the passive voice creates several problems in this sentence. The pronoun *he*, for example, could refer to Doodle or Daddy. Just who is being dragged around? You might also notice that the original sentence is fifteen words long, but this one is twenty.

Active voice: With great effort, Doodle buries the scarlet ibis in the flower garden.

Passive voice: The scarlet ibis is buried in the flower garden by Doodle with great effort.

This sentence is wordy and inefficient.

Beginning writers seem to believe that the passive voice makes their writing sound more formal and academic. They resort to contrived devices such as the following:

It is understood by the reader that the young narrator is embarrassed by Doodle’s many weaknesses.

Why not just say it directly and simply?

Doodle’s many weaknesses embarrass the young narrator.

SENTENCE VARIETY

Variety in sentence structure is achieved in one of two ways:

- Using different types of sentences
- Beginning your sentences in different ways

Types of sentences:

- **Simple, declarative sentences** express one complete thought.

Example: Doodle makes necklaces of flowers and floats them out to sea.

- **Compound sentences** connect two or more complete thoughts in one of three ways.

1. With a conjunction preceded by a comma
,and ,or ,so ,but ,nor ,for ,yet

Example: The narrator teaches Doodle to walk, **but** he is not content to let Doodle stop there.

2. With a semicolon

Example: Doodle’s parents seem to expect him to die; they have a coffin built for him when he is an infant.

3. With a transition between the two complete thoughts

;accordingly, ;in fact, ;therefore, ;furthermore,
;also, ;instead, ;thus, ;hence,
;besides, ;moreover, ;for example, ;however,
;consequently, ;nevertheless, ;for instance, ;otherwise,
;indeed, ;similarly, ;that is, ;still,

Example: Doodle walked because his brother was ashamed of having a crippled brother; **nevertheless**, Doodle’s brother greatly enhances the quality of Doodle’s life by teaching him to walk.

- **Complex sentences** connect a complete thought to a clause at the beginning or end of the complete thought.

Words that introduce the clauses:

after	as though	since	when
although	because	so that	whenever
as	before	than	where
as if	if	though	wherever
as long as	in order that	unless	while
as soon as	provided that	until	

Example: **After** he teaches Doodle to walk, Doodle’s brother sets new goals for Doodle to achieve.

Example: Doodle must learn to run and climb **before** school starts in the fall.

Beginning sentences in different ways:

- ***Introductory phrases:***

Telling lies is one of Doodle's favorite pastimes.

Covered in a film of Paris green to kill the rats, the little coffin is stored in the barn loft.

To frighten his brother, the narrator takes Doodle up to the barn loft and makes him touch the small coffin.

Pulling Doodle up to his feet repeatedly, the narrator eventually discovers Doodle can stand on his own legs for a brief moment.

Throughout the summer, the two boys work diligently to improve Doodle's other skills.

- ***Appositives:***

The scarlet ibis, *a tropical bird from South America*, perches in the top branch of the bleeding tree.

- ***Modifiers:***

Tired and frightened, Doodle hurries to escape the impending storm.

Another strategy for promoting flow and readability in writing is ***sentence combining***. Combining short sentences into longer, more fluid, sentences adds variety to your style.

- Example:*** Doodle knows he has failed. Doodle is watching his brother for a sign of mercy.
- Combined:*** Doodle knows he has failed, *but* he is watching his brother for a sign of mercy.
- Example:*** The cruel streak in Doodle's brother awakens. He runs from Doodle as fast as he can.
- Combined:*** *When* the cruel streak in Doodle's brother awakens, he runs from Doodle as fast as he can.

VOCABULARY SUBSTITUTIONS

Effective word choice is very important in writing. Learn to vary your vocabulary and search for words with precise meanings. The following are alternatives to words often overused in essay writing.

Alternatives to *says*:

acknowledges	demurs	mimics	restates
acquiesces	denies	moans	resumes
adds	denounces	mumbles	retorts
addresses	describes	murmurs	returns
admits	dictates	muses	reveals
admonishes	directs	mutters	roars
advises	discloses	nags	rules
advocates	divulges	narrates	sanctions
affirms	drawls	notes	scoffs
agrees	elaborates	notifies	screams
alleges	emphasizes	objects	shrieks
allows	enjoins	observes	snaps
announces	entreats	orates	sneers
answers	enunciates	petitions	sobs
approves	estimates	pleads	solicits
argues	exclaims	points out	specifies
asserts	explains	prays	speaks
assents	exposes	predicts	stammers
assumes	expresses	proclaims	states
assures	falters	professes	stipulates
attests	foretells	prompts	storms
avows	fumes	propounds	stresses
babbles	giggles	publicizes	suggests
banters	holds	quibbles	taunts
bargains	implies	rants	thinks
boasts	indicates	reassures	threatens
claims	infers	reciprocates	urges
complains	instructs	refutes	vows
confides	lectures	relates	wails
contradicts	lies	remonstrates	warns
debates	maintains	responds	
decides	mentions	resumes	

Notice how all the verbs are in *present tense*.

Alternatives to *shows* or *tells*:

accounts for	details	proves
acknowledges	develops	refers to
alludes to	displays	represents
answers	elucidates	restates
argues	establishes	results in
arrives at the conclusion	evinces	reviews
ascertains	exemplifies	sheds light
confirms	exhibits	signifies
connotes	expounds	solves
can construe	illustrates	stands to reason
conveys	implies	substantiates
corroborates	indicates	symbolizes
declares	infers	teaches
can deduce	informs	touches upon
defines	can interpret	verifies
denotes	manifests	points to
describes		

Notice how the verbs are all in *present tense*.

Alternatives to *very*:

bitterly	incredibly	richly
chiefly	indefinitely	severely
especially	infinitely	shockingly
exceedingly	intensely	slightly
extremely	mightily	truly
immeasurably	powerfully	unusually

Alternative to *you*:

each	several	one*
few	everyone	many
everybody	some	no one
all	nobody	most
anyone	many	anybody
none	someone	somebody

* Be careful with becoming too repetitive with the use of “one.” Be sure to choose other options from the list provided.

USE OF THIRD PERSON

Pronouns are particularly problematic parts of speech because they change their forms, depending on the gender and number of their antecedents, as well as on the function they perform in a sentence. In writing, they offer the point of view of a specific person.

First Person:

- Refers to the one who is speaking.
- First person pronouns are as follows: ***I, me, my, mine; we, us, our, ours***
- First person point of view is personal.

Example: Because **my** brother often teases **me** and makes **me** feel bad, **I** feel a great amount of sympathy for Doodle as he copes with his brother's cruelty.

Explanation: If your teacher were asking you to write a personal reflection about the story, this point of view would be acceptable. This point of view, however, does not present an arguable point; how **you** feel is completely personal and not subject to debate. Remember that a literary analysis presents an argument.

Second Person:

- Refers to the one being spoken to.
- Second person pronouns are as follows: ***you, your, yours***
- Second person is used in speaking, in dialogue, and in giving directions to indicate the person **being directly spoken to**.

Example: In the beginning of the story, **you** have no idea that the narrator's resentment will cause such a tragic outcome.

Explanation: Unless you possess some magical way of getting inside your readers' minds and understanding how they are thinking, you have no right to assume that you can speak for them!

Third person:

- Third person pronouns are as follows: ***he, she, it, him, her, his hers; they, them, theirs***
- Third person is **objective**. It separates the writer, the reader, and the topic.
- Third person is a far more effective and persuasive method to express opinions than the rather limited first person or the very casual second person.
- Although advanced and professional writers will occasionally use first person, *developing* writers should **stay with the third person** for their analytical essays.

Example: In some ways, the special bond that the narrator forms with Doodle actually makes *him* feel as if Doodle is more like *his* personal possession than *his* sibling.

Explanation: This third person statement possesses the authoritative tone of a general observation. It does not pretend to speak for the reader as using the second person would nor does it limit itself to only one singular point of view as first person would.

The following examples might help you to see how much stronger and effective your opinions sound when they are stated in third person.

Weak Statement:

To *me*, Doodle and the scarlet ibis are both fragile outsiders who cannot survive in the environment of everyday life, but *I* think it is ironic that the real world is weaker when the two of them die. (first person }

Improved With Third Person:

Doodle and the scarlet ibis are both fragile outsiders who cannot survive in the environment of everyday life, but ironically, the world is weakened when the two of them die.

Weak Statement:

Hurst implies that *you* can sometimes mistreat even people *you* love if they fail to live up to *your* unrealistic expectations. (second person)

Improved With Third Person:

Hurst implies that even noble emotions such as love can have negative effects when a loved one fails to live up to unrealistic expectations.

Weak Statement:

You can understand the narrator's frustration at having to take his weak brother with him everywhere he goes. (second person)

Improved With Third Person:

The narrator is frustrated at having to take his weak brother with him everywhere.

PITFALLS TO AVOID IN AN ANALYTICAL ESSAY

- Avoid beginning sentences with *and, but, so, however* (these usually join two sentences).
- Avoid using the word *it* with any frequency.
- Avoid overusing the same vocabulary words.
- Avoid using any slang or vulgarity.
- Avoid using numerals or abbreviations (spell out numbers under 100).
- Avoid using first person: I, me, my, myself, we, us, our, ourselves.
(Perhaps the only place you could use “we,” “us,” or “our” is in the conclusion if you are making a universal statement. But use it sparingly!)
- Avoid using second person: you, your, you’re, yours.
- Avoid writing one-sentence paragraphs.
- Avoid using contractions (don’t, can’t, won’t).
- Avoid using the word *etc.*

- Avoid using the following words which are inappropriate for an analytical essay:

fun	‘cuz	guys	pretty	okay
a lot	dumb	hard	real	sort of
and then	every	just	rough	kind of
bad	get	kids	‘til	great
big	good	lots	neat	thing
‘cause	got	nice	cute	pretty good

- Avoid using the following phrases:

These words. . .	I think. . .
This sentence. . .	I feel. . .
This example. . .	I will prove that. . .
This quotation/quote. . .	In my opinion. . .
This essay. . .	This paper. . .

- Avoid beginning sentences with *there is, there are, this is, that is, it is.*

Make sure you *do*:

- Underline or *italicize* titles of novels and plays.
- Put titles of poems and short stories in quotes (“ ”).
- Spell correctly the author’s name, title of the literary work and characters’ names.
Do *not* refer to the author on a first-name basis.
- Keep your writing clear of grammatical errors such as subject/verb agreement, punctuation, pronoun agreement, usage, sentence structure, and commonly confused words such as affect/effect.

DICTION AND TONE

Always remember to consider your audience, or reader. For the sake of clarity and comprehension, avoid language that is either too formal or too informal. Language that is too formal seems impressive but contains big, abstract words and complex sentences which too often create distance between writer and reader. On the other hand, language that is too informal often contains slang, nonstandard English, and cliché, resulting in an immature style and disrespectful tone.

Instead, try a balance between respectful prose and natural, simple language. Here are a few ideas to help you:

- Make sure that your sentences are clearly and directly stated.
- Respect words by making every one count. Make precise word choices and eliminate unnecessary words and phrases from your writing.
- Use words for their specific connotations, force, shades of meaning, and even sound.
- Avoid abstract or ambiguous words.
- Choose a word that is familiar and natural over one that is stuffy and pretentious.
- When you use a thesaurus, always select a word you already know, for words can have different meanings in different contexts.
- Avoid clichés. Try to make your writing fresh by creating your own images or figurative language.
- Avoid slang and colloquial language.

PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

Final Draft Essays

- Use white paper only
- Double-space the entire essay (do not triple space between paragraphs unless your teacher has instructed you to use block style)
- Select a simple print font, such as Times New Roman (no italics or script)
- Use 10 or 12 font size, depending on font style
- Indent new paragraphs
- Observe standard 1” margins
- Staple your essay together, including a title page (see page 7)
- Avoid covers or folders
- Avoid pictures, decorations, or clip art
- Place all prewriting materials and rough drafts behind the final draft (if asked to submit them)

In-Class Essays/ On-Demand Writings

- Use blue or black ink only
- Use white college-ruled lined paper (no spiral bound paper)
- Write only on the front side of the paper if the paper is thin
- Write legibly and neatly

PLAGIARISM

Often it seems that students and their teachers have opposing aims: students want to get their assignments done with minimum time and effort for the maximum grade; teachers want students to expend maximum effort even if the assignment isn't graded. Teachers know from experience that learning takes great time and effort. There simply is no getting around it: *learning is hard work*. Yes, we have heard all the arguments: you have so many classes, so many assignments in all of them, you *have* to get into a good college – no matter what – in order to be successful or save the world. It's the *no matter what* that bothers us. We all want you to be successful – without damaging your integrity or compromising your learning. You do both each time you buy a paper online, “borrow” someone else's work, or copy criticism found with online search engines or even at the library. You become less of the person you can be and lose a learning opportunity each time you cheat.

This problem of writer integrity is known as *plagiarism*, the act of using someone else's ideas or writing without acknowledging the source, and therefore passing it off as your own. Think of it as a form of literary theft.

You are *plagiarizing* if you do not acknowledge the source when you do any of the following:

- use the written material word-for-word
- paraphrase by following the general sentence structure of the written material while substituting some of your own words, phrases, or even sentences
- use information that is not considered general knowledge

Avoid plagiarism by doing the following:

- document your source material **AND**
- quote it appropriately **OR**
- paraphrase large passages of information by reducing them to just the main ideas

Penalties for plagiarism:

Plagiarism not only erodes your integrity and undermines the learning process, but also destroys the trust your teacher has in you, making all the work you have done for your essay suspect. Plagiarism is a serious violation and will result in a **ZERO**, as well as *referral* to both the *disciplinary file* and to the *Academic Honesty file*. A second offense in any class may result in an **F grade in the class**.

Colleges may expel a student for a single instance of plagiarism. It is a serious offense.