

## Things to Remember When Writing A Literary Analysis Paper

1. Every paper must have a **title**. The title should tell specifically what the paper is about. It is also better if it is not dull and boring. Often titles have two parts: a humorous or witty title plus a subtitle that explains exactly what the paper is about. The subtitle is added with a colon. Titles are written in upper and lower case and are not underlined or put in quotation marks; you are not writing a book, nor are you quoting your own title.

Sample titles:

“Tell All the Truth/ But Tell It Slant”: [in quotes because it is lines from a poem]  
An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism

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Angles We Have Heard on Frye:  
Responses to the Literary Criticism of Northrop Frye

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Old Father Nile:  
T.S. Eliot and Harold Bloom  
On the Creative Process as Spontaneous Generation

2. The title of the paper should probably tie in with the **THESIS**: this is another thing that every paper should have. There should always be a point to your analysis: the whole paper should be organized so as to prove some general statement you are making about the work--its meaning, its use of imagery, its structure, its similarities or dissimilarities to other works.

It is usual to think of a thesis sentence in a paper, but sometimes, in longer or more complicated papers, the thesis cannot be expressed in a single sentence. It is okay if it takes you two or three sentences to develop your whole thesis.

A thesis also needs to be fairly specific. Avoid writing generic theses such as “These two works are alike in some ways but different in many others.” Your thesis should describe the specific ways they are similar and different.

3. Theses generally appear in **INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS** -- another thing your paper should have. A typical introductory paragraph in a literary analysis paper should do the following:

- name the authors and titles of all the works you are going to discuss in the paper, in the order in which you are going to discuss them. Unless there is some other pressing organizational strategy you are using, it is probably best to deal with works in chronological order; that way you avoid silly errors such as saying Dracula (1897) influenced Frankenstein (1816).
- provide a map of the rest of the paper. This may simply be the complete articulation of all of your thesis, or the list of all the works you are dealing with. At any rate, the reader should have a pretty good, general idea of the major parts of the paper.
- give any background information that the average reader would need to know in order to understand your paper.

The length of an introduction is proportional to the rest of the paper. Short papers (4-5 pp) usually have an intro paragraph about 1/2 a page long. A longer paper (8-10 pp.) might have a two-paragraph, page-long introduction.

3. You stay in **present tense** when you are talking about what happens in a book or poem. This is because as you are reading it the events seem to be happening in your head, and whenever you discuss events in your paper it is as though you are reading the book again. There are times when you will want to use past tense; for example, when you refer back to events that happened earlier in the work. But the main thing to remember is that "The literature is never dead," so don't talk about it as though it were a corpse.

4. Papers are made up of these things called **paragraphs**. A typical paragraph in a literary analysis paper is made up of three things:

- a) a generalization -- what you think
- b) evidence -- what is said in the literary work to prove your point
- c) analysis -- an explanation of the textual evidence that shows the reader exactly what you think the quote or plot summary or piece of information means.

Never separate your generalization from your evidence: they should be part of the same paragraph. Never put two topics in the same paragraph without writing a topic sentence that explains the relationship between them. Always introduce quotations so that the context of the quotation in the book is clear.

5. Don't try to write on a topic which you don't understand. If you feel confused writing about it, the reader will be even more confused reading about it.

6. When you quote be sure you are reproducing exact words and punctuation. When you quote poetry, you must also show line breaks and stanza arrangement. If you are quoting only two or three lines, use slashes to indicate line breaks; otherwise, indent and arrange the quote so that it looks just like it did in the book.

If a quotation is longer than about three lines of type it should be indented --ten spaces on the left, a little on the right. When you indent you are showing it is a quote so you do not need to use quotation marks also.

7. Big things are underlined (like full-length books, magazines, newspapers, record albums, feature films, and battleships); little things or works which are a part of other works go in quotes (chapter titles, articles in magazines or newspapers, individual cuts on an album).