

BLM 1 – Student Guide for Literary Analysis Essays

Structure

The purpose of literary essays is to argue and prove a point about literature (sometimes one piece, sometimes more than one). The argument itself is expressed in the form of a thesis statement, and the evidence lies throughout the body of the essay.

	What it should do
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• engage the reader• give a context for your topic – state title(s) and author(s), some background to the literature and some background to the topic• express thesis statement
Body Paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• transition sentence• develop the set of evidence; give background, state your point in a topic sentence, introduce example, integrate quotation from the piece, and relate back to the thesis statement• conclude paragraph
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• transition sentence• discuss the logical conclusion of the evidence you have presented in the body paragraphs• tie all loose ends together• come up with a really strong concluding sentence to end the essay

Transitions

Transitions are needed from sentence to sentence, and from paragraph to paragraph. Transitions make the flow of any written piece smooth and easy to follow, by avoiding abrupt changes in topic. Here is a list of linking words that are helpful in making transitions:

For...	Try these linking words:
Cause-effect	as a result, because, consequently, for this reason, however, since, therefore, thus
Compare	although, by contrast, compared with (to), even though, however, in the same way, likewise, on the other hand, similarly
Conclusion	finally, in short, in summary, then, therefore, to summarize
Emphasis	again, also, equally important, furthermore, in addition, in fact, moreover
Explanation	because, for example, for instance, for this reason, in other words, in particular, since, specifically
Importance	equally important, finally, first, second, third, lastly, most importantly, next
Time	after, afterward, as, at last, before, during, finally, just then, later, meanwhile, next, once, since, soon, suddenly, then, while

Developing Thesis Statements

Thesis statements are integral to the essay; the better they are, the better the essay is. The following is a guide to developing thesis statements. The examples come from Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*.

- A thesis statement summarizes briefly the argument that you will be proving in your essay. Here is an example:

In Thomas King's novel The Back of the Turtle, we are taught that corporate greed is often accompanied by a lack of ethics.

This is a thesis statement because it names the topic, presents a provable argument, and lists the main points. The following is NOT a thesis statement:

In this essay I will write about greed and ethics in The Back of the Turtle.

This is not a thesis statement because it simply names a topic, the word "essay" is mentioned, and no argument is broached.

- Thesis statements explain the writer's purpose, answer questions, and provide solutions rather than posing questions.
- You may use "I" in a thesis statement, but you should not mention the word "essay."
- A good thesis statement is direct and straightforward – it may be a well-developed sentence, but it is easy to understand.
- Sometimes it is easier to begin a thesis sentence with a preposition (as, because, until, although, when, while, however, therefore) in an introductory clause. For example, *While The Back of the Turtle seems at first glance to be purely about Gabriel's search for redemption, the novel also explores our need, as human beings, to make reparations for the mistakes we have made.*
- A particularly good thesis statement takes the topic given and narrows it, making it very specific and different from other papers written on the same topic.
- Generally, a thesis statement appears at the end of the first paragraph of an essay, so that readers will have a clear idea of what to expect as they read.
- It avoids vague language like "it seems."!
- It should pass the *So what? or Who cares? test* (Would your most honest friend respond with "But everyone knows that. "?). For instance, "Gabriel is a character in the novel," would be unlikely to evoke any opposition.