

Your last name, first name

Instructor's title and name

Class

Date

How to Write an Essay in Literature

Your introduction should position your paper in the field of study in which it inscribes itself, and it should tell your reader about the main purpose of your contribution. Write about the latest outcomes of the studies you have read and engage with them. You can even challenge them. Determine what is missing from the scholarship you have found, and state how your paper will contribute to filling this gap. This is where you state your thesis. Your thesis is the main claim of your paper; it is your contribution to the academic conversation you have identified. To be effective, your thesis statement must be formulated as a clear, precise argument. If you need to announce your thesis with an introductory clause, be sure to use an analytical verb: I prove / I determine / I establish / I show / I posit, are a few good examples. Such analytical verbs will make you sound assertive, and they will prevent you from writing a descriptive paper. Once you have stated your thesis, you can offer a short plan of your paper. Mention the major arguments that support your thesis. Note: use the present tense, not the future tense, and write in the first person. Your paper does not do the work: you do.

Now that you have stated your intentions in the introduction, you can move on to the body of your text. This is where you develop your analysis. Your major arguments can be separated into smaller ideas, which you explore individually in separate paragraphs. There should be one idea per paragraph, and the first sentence of each paragraph, i.e., the topic sentence, needs to state what each paragraph is about. Once you have fully treated an idea, you can start a new paragraph. There is no set structure for a paper in literature, but keep in mind that your arguments should follow one another seamlessly, without the artificial help of too many connectors.

Your analysis should always stay close to your primary source(s). This will prevent you from writing a paper that is based on general truths which often veer too close to truisms. You will also need to use secondary sources to support each of your arguments. When selecting your sources, keep in mind that they must be directly connected with your study (avoid broad, general studies), and that you cannot trust everything you find online. You should only trust peer-reviewed works. Once you have selected the list of works with which you will engage, isolate the most important passages that support your claims and that you intend to quote in your text. Your quotes must be clearly attributed to their authors. “Use quotation marks to indicate that these are not your own words” (Author 45).¹ If a quote is longer than three lines,

present it as an independent paragraph that is indented in this manner. There should not be an excessive number of long quotes in your paper. Condense the passages you quote to the essence of their argument, using ellipses . . . wherever necessary. Note that there is no change in the font size, no additional space between the paragraphs, and there are no quotation marks around the passage. Another detail to which you should pay attention is that, whereas in the short quote, the period was placed after the parenthetical reference, here it appears before the reference.

(Writer 34)

As your reader is primarily interested in your own contributions, you must always comment on the passages you quote. Quotes do not speak for themselves. Do not repeat what is said in your source but explain why the passage you just cited is important to your argument. Also,

¹ Your references must always be written in parentheses in your text, not in footnotes.

Footnotes should only be used to include information that is not essential to your analysis.

Also, note that the font-size (12pt) and line-spacing (double) rules are unchanged and that the footnote indicator is placed after the punctuation mark.

note that the paragraph that follows long, isolated quotes should not be indented, as it does not start a new idea; it comments on the quote. “Do not end a paragraph with a quote” (Writer 45). Your comment on the quote should conclude the paragraph.

Though your instructor will mostly evaluate the quality of your arguments, the form of your paper will also play an important role in your final grade. Before submitting your paper, make sure it follows the latest edition of the MLA Handbook. For a short paper, you do not need to include headings or a table of contents. Indent each of your paragraphs, do not justify the right margin, and ensure your whole paper is double-spaced. As for your language, it should be professional and serious, but not pompous. Do not use contractions or colloquialisms, and write short, straightforward sentences that will allow you to present your ideas in a clear manner. Convoluted sentences can result in grammar mistakes. Remember that formal inaccuracies will prevent your instructor from focusing solely on your analysis. The more attention you grant to these formal elements, the more detailed and helpful your instructor’s feedback will be.

You have now treated all your arguments, and you are ready to wrap up your analysis (congrats!). Your conclusion should highlight the main findings of your paper. Do not repeat what you have already said and done in the body of your text but speak in terms of results: do not say what you have done but what you have learned. Go back to your thesis statement and all your topic sentences and engage with your analysis critically. State what you have determined, explain how you have determined it, and say why these results are important. Some people like to conclude their research with an opening interrogation. Though this is not necessary and can even be dangerous (it has the potential of revealing a gap in your own research), it is possible, but it should never be phrased as a direct question.

Works Cited

Author, Calvin. “Title of the article.” *Title of the Journal*, vol, no, date, pp.

Writer, Amanda. *Title of Book*. Edited by Emily Editor, Publisher, year.