**Honors LA 10**

**March 2014**

**Ms. Lewis’ Guidelines for Writing an Argumentative Essay[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**The Introduction**

The introduction to your literary analysis essay should try to capture your reader’s interest. To bring immediate focus to your subject, you may want to use a quotation, a provocative question, a brief anecdote, a startling statement, or a combination of these. You may also want to include background information relevant to your thesis and necessary for the reader to understand the position you are taking. In addition, you need to include the title of the work of literature and name of the author. The following are satisfactory introductory paragraphs which include appropriate thesis statements:

**Ex**: The setting of John Updike’s story “A & P” is crucial to the reader’s understanding of Sammy’s decision to quit his job. Even though Sammy knows that his quitting will make life more difficult for him, he instinctively insists upon rejecting what the A & P represents in the story. When he rings up a “No Sale” and “saunter[s]” out of the store, Sammy leaves behind not only a job but the rigid state of mind associated with the A & P. Although Sammy is the central character in the story, Updike seems to invest as much effort in describing the setting as he does Sammy. The title, after all, is not “Youthful Rebellion” or “Sammy Quits” but “A & P.” The setting is the antagonist of the story and plays a role that is as important as Sammy’s.

**Ex**: What would one expect to be the personality of a man who has his wife sent away to a convent (or perhaps has had her murdered) because she took too much pleasure in the sunset and in a compliment paid to her by another man? It is just such a man—a Renaissance duke—who Robert Browning portrays in his poem “My Last Duchess.” A character analysis of the Duke reveals that through his internal dialogue, his interpretation of earlier incidents, and his actions, his traits—arrogance, jealousy, and greediness—emerge.

**The Body of the Essay: Topic Sentences and Evidence**

The development of the central idea of an argumentative essay is the **body.** In this section you present the (usually three) paragraphs that support your thesis statement. Good essays contain an explanation of your ideas and evidence from the text that supports those ideas. Evidencecan consist of summary, paraphrasing, and direct quotations.

Each paragraph should contain a **topic sentence** (usually the first sentence of the paragraph) which states one of the sub-topics associated with your thesis. Think of it as a sort of mini-thesis, which does two things for your paper: it relates the details of the paragraph to your thesis statement, and it defines the goal of the paragraph itself.

**Ex**: Sammy's descriptions of the A & P present a setting that is ugly, monotonous, and rigidly regulated. The chain store is a common fixture in modern society, so the reader can identify with the uniformity Sammy describes. The fluorescent light is as blandly cool as the "checkerboard green-and-cream rubber tile floor" (486). The "usual traffic in the store moves in one direction (except for the swim suited girls, who move against it), and everything is neatly organized and categorized in tidy aisles. The dehumanizing routine of this environment is suggested by Sammy's offhand references to the typical shoppers as "sheep," "house slaves," and "pigs” (486). These regular customers seem to walk through the store in a stupor; as Sammy indicates, not even dynamite could move them out of their routine (485).

This paragraph is a strong one because it is developed through the use of quotations, summary, details, and explanation to support the topic sentence. Notice how it relates back to the thesis statement.

**The Conclusion**

Your literary analysis essay should have a concluding paragraph that gives your essay a sense of completeness and lets your readers know that they have come to the end of your paper. Your concluding paragraph might restate the thesis in different words, summarize the main points you have made, or make a relevant comment about the literary work you are analyzing, but from a different perspective. Do *not* introduce a new topic in your conclusion.

**Ex**: If the Duke has any redeeming qualities, they fail to appear in the poem. Browning's emphasis on the Duke's traits of arrogance, jealousy, and materialism make it apparent that anyone who might have known the Duke personally would have based his opinion of him on these three personality "flaws." Ultimately, the reader’s opinion of the Duke is not a favorable one, and it is clear that Browning intended that the reader feel this way.

**The Title of Your Essay**

It is essential that you give your essay a title that is descriptive of the approach you are taking in your paper. Just as you did in your introductory paragraph, try to get the reader's attention. Using only the title of the literary work you are examining is unsatisfactory.

**Ex**: Robert Browning's Duke: A Portrayal of a Sinister Man

The A & P as a State of Mind

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1. With some resources from the University of Ottawa’s writing center via http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)