

# **H o w to write an essay**

Thanks to Jane Schaffer for her ideas and examples and to TuHS students for excerpts from their essays.

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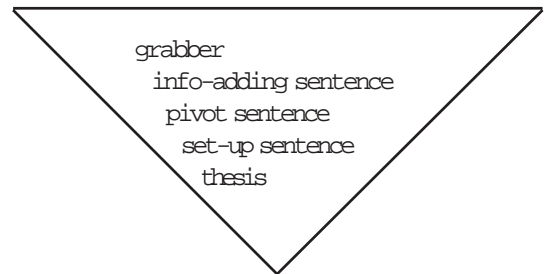
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# Expository Essay Structure

This structure will be useful for science, history, and other subject essays.

## Introduction:

This paragraph moves from generalizations about the topic of the thesis to the statement of the thesis. This thesis is the controlling idea of the paper. It comes at the end of the first paragraph and tells the reader what will be discussed. Ninth grade writers may have a briefer introduction. This five-sentence format is used for sophomore-senior essays. The teacher will let you know when a different kind of introduction would be appropriate.



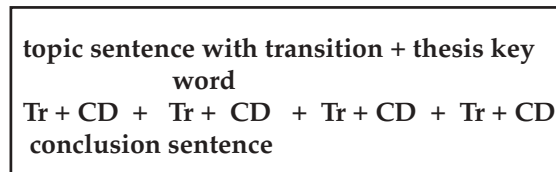
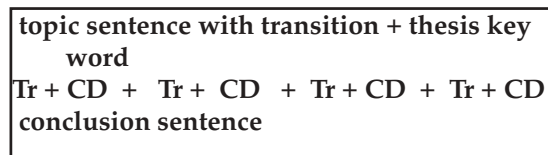
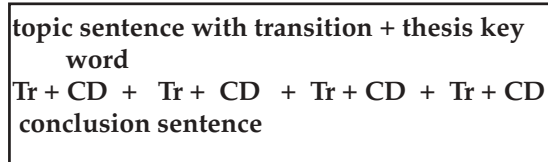
## Body Paragraphs:

### Development of the thesis

These paragraphs, on the freshman level, develop the main idea by explaining concrete details that support the thesis. These paragraphs have a minimum of four concrete details. A concluding sentence summarizes the paragraph's main point = six sentences. For Sophomores-seniors, the number of concrete details and commentary on those details varies.

### Transitions

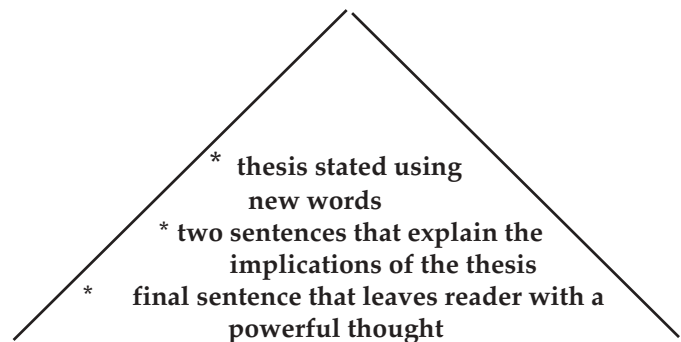
Transitions help move the reader between paragraphs and between concrete details. See page 15.



sophomore-senior levels will have commentary on some of the details.

## Conclusion:

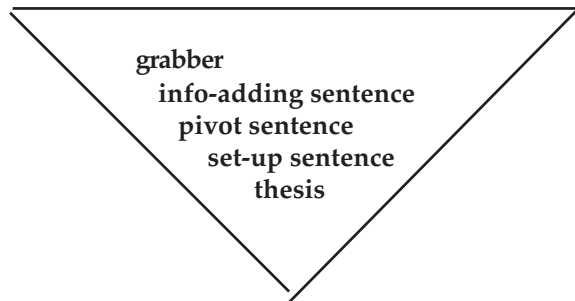
This paragraph moves from the **reworded** thesis to its general implications, using two+ sentences that identify the importance (so what?) or results (who cares?) of the thesis, **without restating information from the paper**. The final sentences or clincher leaves the reader with a significant, powerful thought. (Again, this paragraph **does not summarize the paper** but **applies knowledge learned from the thesis**.)



# Expository Essay: Literary

## Introduction:

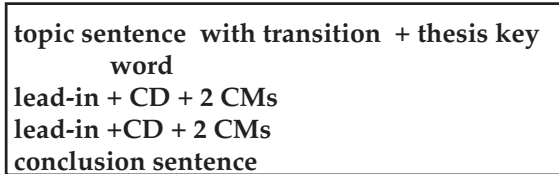
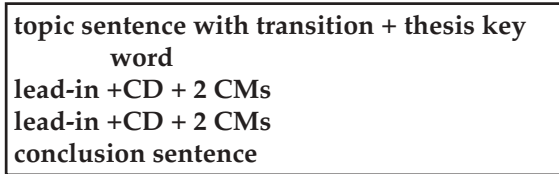
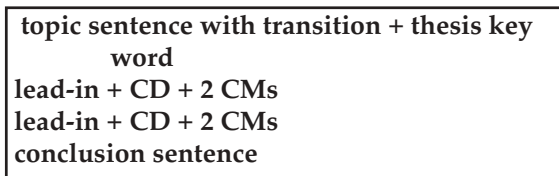
This paragraph moves from generalizations about the topic of the thesis to the statement of the thesis. This thesis is the controlling idea of the paper. It comes at the end of the first paragraph and tells the reader what will be discussed. Ninth grade writers may have a briefer introduction. This five-sentence format is used for sophomore-senior essays.



## Body Paragraphs:

### Development of the thesis

These paragraphs develop the main idea by explaining two points that support the thesis. These paragraphs have a minimum of two concrete details and two commentaries per detail. A concluding sentence summarizes the paragraph's main point = eight sentences.



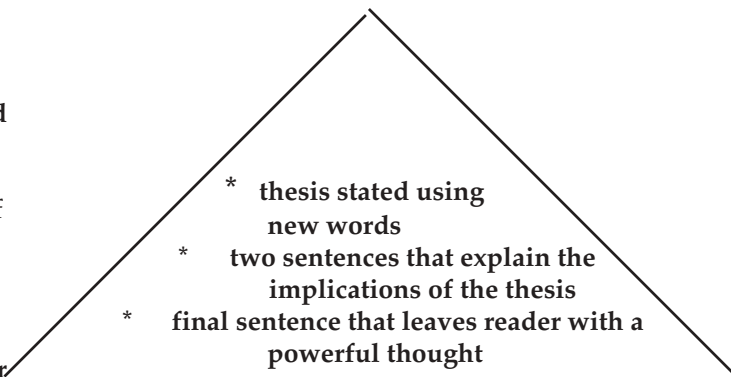
sophomore-senior levels will have three or more cds and the cds and cms will be combined in one sentence.

### Transitions

Transitions help move the reader between paragraphs and between concrete details. See page 15.

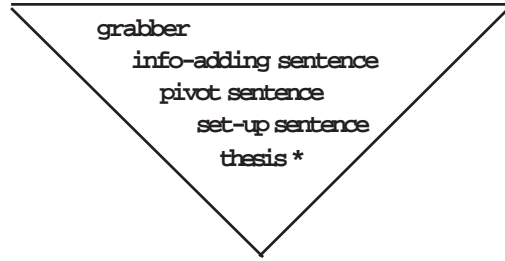
## Conclusion:

This paragraph moves from the **reworded** thesis to its general implications, using two+ sentences that identify the importance (so what?) or results (who cares?) of the thesis, **without restating information from the paper**. The final sentences or clincher leaves the reader with a significant, powerful thought. (Again, this paragraph **does not summarize the paper** but **applies knowledge learned from the thesis**.)



# Persuasive Essay Structure

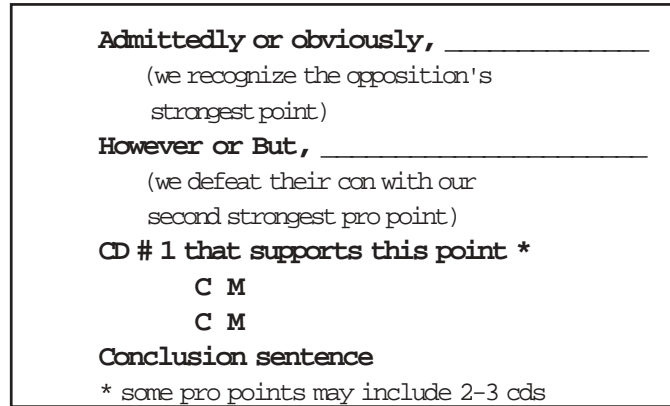
In a persuasive thesis, we present our opinion on a topic, trying to convince the reader.



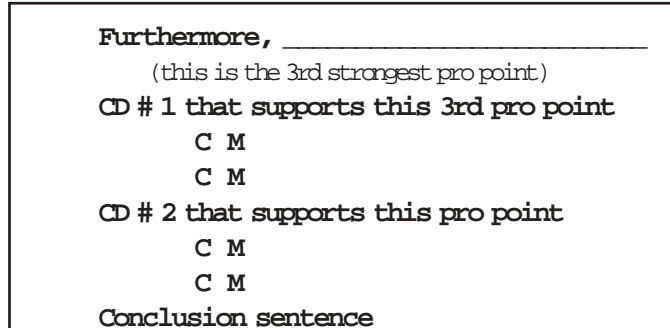
\* thesis includes a word like "should" or "must"

con from  
opposition

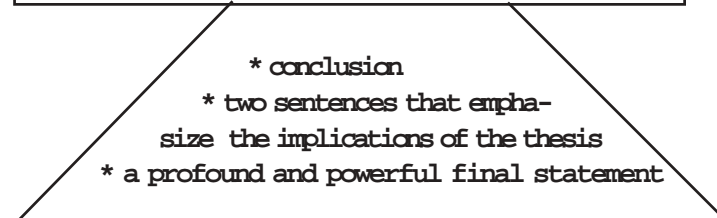
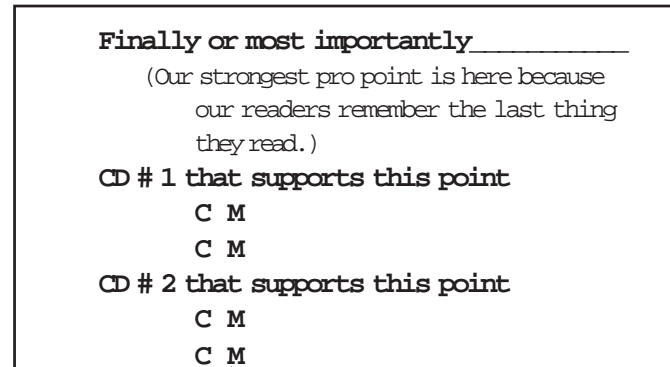
pro point # 2



pro point # 3



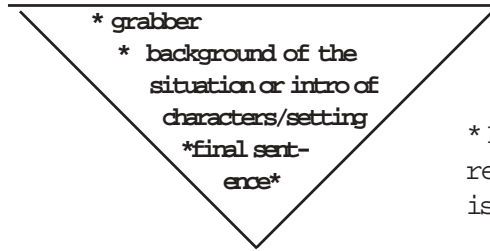
pro point # 1 =  
strongest pro  
point



# Imaginative-Narrative Essay Structure

The imaginative essay is a piece of non-fiction or creative non-fiction and the narrative essay is an essay that relates an experience that taught the writer something or that had an important effect on the writer.

## OPENING PARAGRAPH



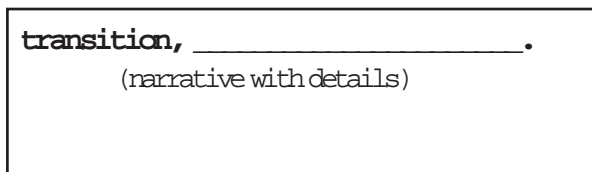
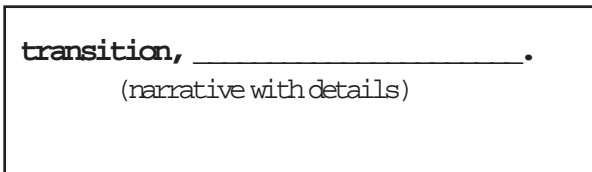
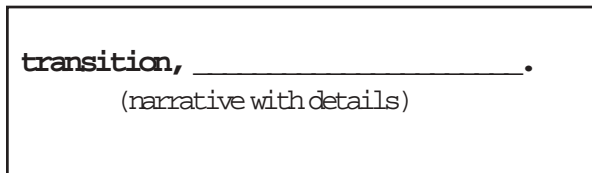
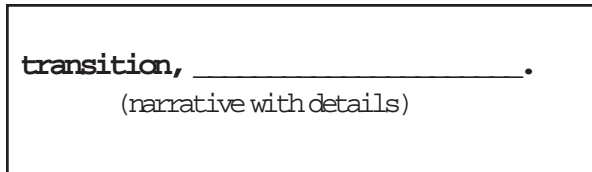
\* By the end of this last sentence, the reader should know what the paper is going to be about.

## BODY PARAGRAPHS

Many of these papers will be chronological in nature, and the flashback technique may be used to enhance the narrative.

Effective narrative transitions are included on p. 15 of this packet. Just use ones that fit the narrative. We also need transitions within the paragraphs to connect or knit the details.

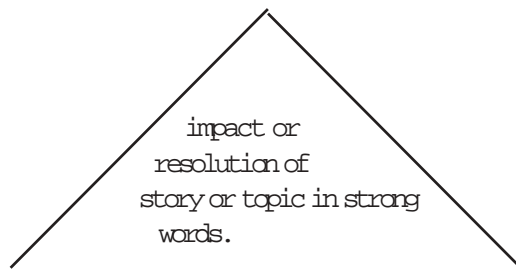
**Details and Description:** Narratives that show (describe details and let readers experience the story) rather than tell (writer inflicts his/her view on reader) will involve the reader in the narrative.



The imaginative/narrative paper is as long as needed to relate the experience. Careful selection of details and words will keep the reader on the edge of his/her seat.

## Conclusion:

The situation we've related is clearly resolved. In a narrative paper, the reader should understand the importance of the experience's impact on the writer. In an imaginative paper, most loose ends, if not all, are "tied up."



# Theses and Topic Sentences Examples

The following are examples of effective theses and topic sentences which support them.

**THESIS:** Despite many thoughts about alpine skiing as a dangerous sport, it should be considered a safe sport because of new technologies.

- (Persuasive)
1. The most important reason why skiing is safer today is the **refined and top-quality equipment available**.
  2. In addition, today's **rapid technology has produced more effective and safer ski lifts**.
  3. Even with safer equipment and ski lifts, accidents can happen; however, **with advanced medical facilities at the ski areas, accidents are attended to much more efficiently**.
- 

**THESIS:** Basketball can be an extremely difficult game to play, and to be one of the best players, the athlete has to possess certain skills.

- (expository)
1. An important factor an excellent player must have is **superior physical conditioning**.
  2. Physical conditioning is a necessity, but in order to be an effective player, an **athlete must learn strong, aggressive offensive and defensive skills**.
  3. Finally, the most important skill the player must learn is **to adopt and keep a positive mental attitude**.
- 

**THESIS:** Ernest Hemingway's life and experiences affected his unique style.

- (expository)
1. First, Hemingway's **childhood** was uneventful but filled with events that he used later in his stories.
  2. Other influences like **his father and a teacher** encouraged Hemingway to "tell his story quick and clean" (Smith 43).
  3. Finally, Hemingway's **social experiences** caused him to develop a "code of behavior" that is evident in many of his works.
- 

**THESIS:** The action of other characters in the play actually drive Ophelia insane.

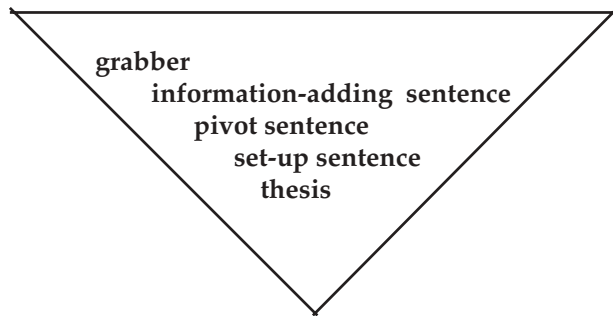
- (literary)
1. Although Ophelia would like desperately to return Hamlet's love, **Laertes and Polonius advise her to reject his love and to avoid seeing him**.
  2. Secondly, Hamlet's **on-again, off-again love** also pushes Ophelia toward the depths of insanity.
  3. Finally, to compound Ophelia's sorrow, **Hamlet accidentally murders her father, and she commits suicide because she can no longer deal with the multitude of negative experiences caused by others**.
- 

**THESIS:** Hamlet's style of communication destroys his relationships with others.

- (literary)
1. Hamlet, for example, could clear up his confusion and the resentment he feels for his mother Gertrude, if **he would discuss his feelings civilly and openly with her**.
  2. Hamlet is also **increasingly rude and evasive with Claudius, killing any hopes of a relationship with his stepfather/uncle**.
  3. Finally, Hamlet could prevent Ophelia's madness by **talking to her honestly**.

# Introductory Paragraph

## Formula for an Introductory Paragraph:



1. The first sentence in the introductory paragraph needs to grab the reader's attention. It needs to be general and introduce the topic of the thesis without referring directly to it. (See page 9 for grabber ideas.)

**Grabber - - - Wouldn't it be nice to live in a perfect world?** (This question format is only one of several grabber possibilities. It is overused.)

2. The second sentence adds information about the grabber, again, still general and not yet referring to the thesis.

**Information-adding sentence - - - In a flawless world, there would be no conflicts, no clashes of character or ideas.**

3. The third sentence pivots or turns us toward the thesis. This is the first sentence that hints about our thesis. We can use a key word from our thesis here.

**Pivot sentence - - - In our world, however, every situation has the opportunity to become a conflict, and we can even see these conflicts in the literature we read.**

4. The fourth sentence is the set-up or lead-in sentence. It leads us directly to the thesis, connecting the topic or idea of the grabber to the point made by the thesis.

**Set-up sentence - - - O Pioneers!, a novel by Willa Cather, is an excellent example of how we can use these situations as learning experiences.**

5. The final sentence is the thesis we wrote first. Everything written so far should lead directly to this idea, the whole point of our paper.

**Thesis - - - The various conflicts in Cather's novel are tools which she uses to teach us that all relationships depend on understanding, trust, and perseverance.**



# Options for Effective Grabbers

The first sentence of an essay is like the opening line in a book—extremely important. After the title, it is the writer's second chance to **grab** the reader's attention. Below are some commonly used "**grabbers**."

1. **addressing the reader directly (most useful for persuasive essays).** Example: "'You are the winner of one of the following fabulous prizes.' No doubt you have read such statements on pieces of mail delivered to your home. Don't believe them. . . ."
2. **begin with a startling, unusual, or enlightening fact.** Example: "The wedding cake has not always been lovingly fed to the bride by her adoring husband." OR "One out of every 500 Americans will not make it home tonight."
3. **start with an example or anecdote.** Example: "Princess Diana's photo once graced the covers of hundreds of magazines." OR "Once, many years ago, my mother was playing golf with some friends."
4. **begin with an interesting or dramatic quotation.** Example: "'To be or not to be.' Even Hamlet had his doubts." OR "Nikes 'just do it' slogan has been applied to much more than running shoes."
5. **start with a question or challenge (this technique can be misused and is used too often):** Example: "Why do some people wear a mask when they cut their lawns?" OR "Would you stop wasting water if your water bill was \$500 a month?"
6. **begin by defining the idea or concept that is the topic of the paper:** Example: "The word 'punk' no longer just means a form of alternative music." OR "The phrase 'free way' is an oxymoron when we look at how many of our tax dollars are spent on adding more byways to our highways."
7. **point out a contradiction that the paper will consider:** Example: "Contrary to popular opinion, 'only children' are not always spoiled." OR "Most Americans think the Russians can't build a reliable refrigerator much less a complicated piece of the International Space Station; however, they are more competent in aerospace engineering than we think, according to Michael Hawes, head of Nasa's international space station."

We hope these grabber possibilities will help writers effectively begin their papers so that they nab the reader's attention and keep him/her wanting more.

# Examples of Introductory Paragraphs

## Sample # 1

grabber  
info-adding sentence

pivot sentence

set-up sentence

thesis

Wouldn't it be nice to live in a perfect world? In a flawless world, there would be no conflicts, no clashes of character or ideas. In our world, however, every situation has the opportunity to become a conflict, and we can even see these conflicts in the literature we read. O Pioneers!, a novel by Willa Cather, shows us how we can use these situations as learning experiences. **The various conflicts in O Pioneers! are tools which she uses to teach us that all relationships depend on understanding, trust, and perseverance.**

## Sample # 2

grabber  
info-adding sentence

pivot sentence

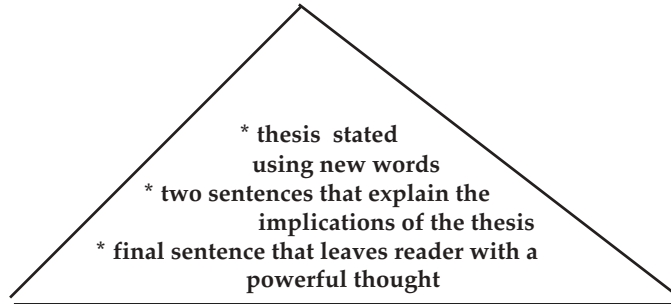
set-up sentence

thesis

In the song "Imagine," John Lennon sings at one point, "Imagine no possessions--I wonder if you can." It really makes us think about what life would be like with no personal belongings. Anne Bradstreet, a seventeenth century Puritan bride, faced this situation when her home is burned. She writes a poem to explain just what it is like to lose everything she owns. **Anne Bradstreet uses narrative voice, excellent word choice, and a distinct pattern to clearly and purposefully recount her story in "Verses Upon the Burning of Our House," encouraging her readers, especially through their trials, to let go of all earthly "pelf" and keep our focus on God, who gives us everything we need (52).**

# Concluding Paragraph

## Formula for a Concluding Paragraph



1. The first sentence in the concluding paragraph is a restatement of the thesis that reflects the knowledge learned.

**Example of a reworded thesis:** Willa Cather challenges her characters with conflicts so that her reader can learn how to create effective relationships.

2. The next two sentences explain the implications of the thesis. We can do this by explaining the importance of or the results of the thesis. Answering "who cares?" or "so what?" helps the reader realize the significance of the thesis.

**Example of two implication sentences:**

The number of road-rage incidences and the number of divorces and failed relationships today indicate that we, too, need to listen to Cather's words of wisdom. Even in this school, students and staff could consistently practice understanding and trust to create a more positive, pleasant learning atmosphere.

3. The final sentence of the concluding paragraph and essay leaves the reader with a powerful thought that extends the two implication sentences. This sentence could be a famous quotation, twist on a common phrase, or strong words.

**Example of a Clincher or final sentence:**

Even though developing effective relationships takes time and effort, the results could have a powerful impact on our school--maybe even our society.

# Examples of Concluding Paragraphs

## Sample # 1

**restated thesis**

**two implication sentences**

**final or clincher sentence**

Willa Cather challenges her characters with conflicts so that her reader can learn how important understanding, trust, and perseverance are in creating effective relationships. The amount of road-rage incidences and the number of divorces and failed relationships today indicate that we, too, need to listen to Cather's words of wisdom. Even in this school, students and staff could practice understanding and trust with perseverance to create a more positive, pleasant learning atmosphere. Tualatin High School would be a better place if we all followed these "Golden Rules."

## Sample # 2

**restated thesis**

**two implication sentences**

**final or clincher sentence**

Clearly, Bradstreet uses her well-worded, descriptive storytelling and method of dealing with challenges to bring her readers to her conclusion that we should reject our possessions for Heavenly treasures. This is a valuable lesson for all people because, though our homes may not burn, we suffer losses in life that we are more prepared to cope with after reading "Verses Upon the Buring of Our House." Bradstreet's pious mind but aching heart assure us that she is indeed human and has to choose to surrender her worldly items to move on in her walk with God. Can we be as strong in faith as this frail, little Puritan bride?

# Ineffective Introduction and Conclusion

grabber

info-adding

pivot

set-up

thesis

This country is filled with people who are out of work and living in the slums. They live off welfare and resort to crime or theft. With so many people in this situation, there are doubtless many causes of unemployment. The typical unemployed person is a good person but too weak to stand up for what he or she wants, much like the women of the Kumalo family. In Cry, the Beloved Country, the women in Kumalo's life have weak personalities.

**Comment:** Writer gives us a condescending, stereotypical view of poverty. The writer makes assumptions that all poor people are criminals and that they are poor because they are weak. Does unemployment have anything to do with this novel and the women in it? The writer makes no connection between the two.

restated thesis

implication sentences

final sentence or clincher

**Weak personalities are a flaw in the women involved with Steven Kumalo.** Like the Kumalo family, the world is plagued with weak personalities. We must be aware of weakness in others if we wish to succeed on our own. Learning of the differences in personalities is vital to our survival. Without acceptance of the diversity in this world, we will never reach our full potential.

**Comment:** What does this conclusion have to do with the introduction? What does learn about personality differences have to do with our survival?

# Effective Introductions + Conclusions

grabber

info-adding

pivot

set-up

thesis

Survival demands strength. Regardless of physical ability, individuals must find and exercise a sense of self and character in order to achieve security and peace. Society has traditionally denied women and minorities the opportunity to develop this personal power. Alan Paton recognizes this in his novel Cry, the Beloved Country. **Paton's characters, Gertrude, Mrs. Kumalo, and the girl, damage and destroy their lives through their inability to assert themselves.**

**Comment:** The writer makes a significant relation to a valid universal idea, even if we don't agree with the opinion.

restated thesis

two implication sentences

final sentence or clincher

**Dominated by their men and their society, Gertrude, Mrs. Kumalo, and the girl flounder and fail.** The end of apartheid holds no promise for these women. They face a bleak future, devoid of personal meaning or fulfillment. In our own society, we must struggle to empower each individual with true "equal opportunity."

**Comment:** Concluding paragraph returns to same idea as the introduction. Restates the thesis without repeating the same sentences.

# Useful Transitions

# Writing Concrete Details with Commentary in Literary Essays

from Jane Schaffer Prod.

**Body paragraphs of the essay support the thesis. Each body paragraph has the following four components:**

- topic sentence with key word from thesis
- concrete details
- commentary sentences (in literary essays, especially)
- concluding sentence

So, each body paragraph will look like one of the following, depending on instructions from the teacher. Other combinations are possible, but we must always have at least one commentary per concrete detail.

## # 1

sentence # 1	=	topic sentence
sentence # 2	=	first sentence of concrete detail
sentence # 3	=	one sentence of commentary about sentence # 2
sentence # 4	=	another sentence of commentary about sentence # 2
sentence # 5	=	a second sentence of concrete detail
sentence # 6	=	one sentence of commentary about sentence # 5
sentence # 7	=	another sentence of commentary about sentence # 5
sentence # 8	=	a concluding sentence

Each of the cds and cms here may be combined in one sentence.

## # 2

sentence # 1	=	topic sentence
sentence # 2	=	first sentence of concrete detail
sentence # 3	=	one sentence of commentary about sentence # 2
sentence # 4	=	second sentence of concrete detail
sentence # 5	=	one sentence of commentary about sentence # 4
sentence # 6	=	third sentence of concrete detail
sentence # 7	=	one sentence of commentary about sentence # 4
sentence # 8	=	a concluding sentence

Each of the cds and cms here may be combined in one sentence.

## **Example of a partial paragraph from a literary commentary on Dickens' Great Expectations:**

- Sentence # 1 (ts): Pip is a lonely boy whose visit to the nearby cemetery scares him.  
Sentence # 2 (CD) For example, he meets a convict who threatens his life and tells Pip to bring him some food and a file.  
Sentence # 3 (CM) He is frightened by the man's wild appearance since he is clearly a stranger.  
Sentence # 4: (CM) A feeling of helplessness overtakes him as he realizes he must do what the man demands.



# Using Concrete Details Effectively

We can either paraphrase (put into our own words) or directly quote (take words verbatim) from our sources. The following are examples from Ellen Gilmore, an English teacher at West Hills High School in Santee, California.

## PARAPHRASE

**Definition:** to put the text into your own words. This doesn't mean changing one or two words of the text. It means we think about what the text states, and then we "translate" that meaning into our words.

Example: Odysseus meets an interesting, if strange, variety of people and things on his journey.

After George kills Lennie, Slim tells him that he thinks George did the right thing.

## DIRECT QUOTATIONS

**Definition:** words, phrases, or sentences from the text.

We may use quotations as our concrete detail, just as we may use paraphrase. We **integrate or blend** the quotation into our own sentences and use a "lead-in" to help the reader follow our point. The following guidelines help us incorporate quotations into our essays effectively.

**(a.) DO NOT OVERUSE QUOTATIONS.** Quotations are like salt in a stew or icing on a cake. Too much is icky. We incorporate quoted phrases into the sentence structure and avoid having two quotations in a row.

Ineffective example: Lennie's strength overpowered Curley. "The next minute Curley was flopping like a fish on a line, and his closed fist was lost in Lennie's big hand."  
"Curley was white and shrunken by now, and his struggling had become weak. He stood crying, his fist lost in Lennie's paw" (Steinbeck 75).

(This quotation is too long and just tacked on rather than used within a sentence or as part of a commentary.)

Effective example: Lennie's strength so overpowered Curley that Curley looked "like a fish on a line" with his "fist lost in Lennie's paw" (Steinbeck 75).

(Here the quotations are used within the writer's sentence and flow smoothly.)

**Ineffective:** "Lennie dabbled his big paw in the water" shows how Steinbeck describes Lennie in animal-like terms (73).

**Effective:** Like a big bear, "Lennie dabbled his paw in the water" (Steinbeck 73).

(b.) **ALTERING A QUOTATION FOR CLARITY.** We can add a word that makes the referent clearer by adding a word in brackets.

**Original:** George says, "That mouse ain't fresh, Lennie, and besides, you've broken it" (Steinbeck 104). =concrete detail

**Clearer:** Steinbeck foreshadows Lennie's troubles early in the novel when Lennie has "broken {the mouse} pettin' it" (104). = commentary followed by concrete detail

We can also keep the **present tense** of the paper by using part of a quotation that doesn't have a past tense verb in it.

**Original:** Taylor realizes she and Lu Ann have become one family unit when she sees "we **were** like some family on a TV commercial . . ." (Kingsolver 89).

**Clearer:** Taylor realizes she and Lu Ann have become a family unit when she sees they **are** "like some family on a TV commercial . . ." (Kingsolver 89).

(If we can't change the passage, we just leave the past tense verb alone.)

(c.) **OMITTING MATERIAL FROM A QUOTATION IN ORDER TO BE PRECISE.**

If we do omit part of a sentence in order to be more concise, we mark the omission with three periods that we call "ellipsis" with a space between each of the periods. We do not, however, need to use the ellipsis at the beginning and end of the quotations we use. The reader understands that some passages are excerpts of the whole sentence.

**Original:** "Curley was white and shrunken by now, and his struggling had become weak. He stood crying, his fist lost in Lennie's paw" (Steinbeck 75).

**With ellipsis:** As Lennie continued to crush Curley's fist, he turned "white and shrunken . . . his fist lost in Lennie's paw" (Steinbeck 75).

d. **WE CAN USE BOTH PARAPHRASE AND QUOTATIONS IN ONE SENTENCE.**

We can use both paraphrase and quotations in a concrete detail.

**Example:** After George kills Lennie, Slim "{comes} directly to George" and says, "A guy got to sometimes" as they leave the river's edge (107).

# Writing Insightful Commentary

## What is Insightful, Meaningful Commentary?

**Insightful, meaningful commentary** refers to our comments, insights, and opinions as they relate to the concrete details we've chosen to support our body thesis. First, the CDs must support the body topic sentences, which then support the thesis. Check for this first. Once they are all in sync, we can really present our insightful commentary with confidence.

### TOO OBVIOUS:

**Napoleon is a mean pig. --it's too obvious, boring, not insightful, and anyone reading the book would realize this.**

### BETTER BUT ALSO OBVIOUS:

**Napoleon is a cruel, uncaring leader who has little regard for the other comrades on the farm; they only serve to bring him to power.**

### EFFECTIVE COMMENTARY:

**As a metaphor for the cruel and inhumane treatment of the proletariat by the ruling class in the Communist Soviet regime, Napoleon represents the weak-willed leaders who sacrificed the working class for their own comfort.**

This is a strong example of insightful commentary. Events, themes, and global perspectives are evident. The allegory to the Soviet communist regime is evident but not written in the text itself, but the connections between literature and the outside world are made apparent by the writer's commentary.

Strong commentary relates details or makes a connection to the author's thesis. In addition to connecting the concrete detail from the text to the thesis with commentary, the writer can also expand the connection to include themes and relate events outside the world of literature.

For example, in a paper which examines the journey and growth of Romeo, a writer in the last concrete detail and commentary could comment on the similarity of Romeo's journey to Odysseus'.

## The Effects of Insightful, Meaningful Commentary

1. **Strong commentary results in varied sentence structure, using compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences.** When we dance, for example, we vary the moves we make on the dance floor. When we speak, we also use long sentences and, sometimes, short ones. If we use commentary correctly, we reduce the number of simple sentences (subject-verb-direct object) in favor of compound and complex sentences. Dependent

clause begin with words like "because," "when," "if," and "although."

Example 1: Instead of just saying, **Napoleon is a mean pig**, we can add a dependent clause to explain how we know he is a mean pig, creating a compound-complex sentence and an example of commentary: **Because he tortures with abandon all who step into his path to absolute control, Napoleon is a mean pig.**

Example 2: Instead of saying **Napoleon is a mean pig**, we can use a compound sentence to explain that he is more than mean. **Napoleon is mean, and he is also an uncaring , unfeeling paragon of porcine narcissism.** A compound sentence combines two complete sentences with a coordinate conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, or yet) or a semicolon.

Example 3: We can combine examples one and two into a compound-complex sentence. **Because he tortures with abandon all who step into his path of absolute control, Napoleon epitomizes the cruel, uncaring leader who has little regard for the other comrades on the farm; they only serve to bring him power.**

**Effective writing includes using such a variety of sentence structure, and writing commentary makes such sentence structure possible.**

**2. Skillfull transitions.** Transitions are words or phrases that tie together ideas within and between paragraphs. Imagine that the concrete detail is a jewel. Imagine that the transition is a setting for the beautiful jewel. Without the proper setting, the jewel cannot be shown off to its best advantage. This is true of concrete detail. **Without the proper setting, the reader doesn't understand why we used that particular quotation in the essay. See page 15 for examples of transitions.**

**Example:**

topic sentence:	"Odysseus' clever mind and courageous behavior are pivotal to his successful journey. <b>For example</b> , after Odysseus conquers the
concrete detail+	Cyclops, he says, 'I have deceived them .' The <b>ruthless act of blinding</b>
transitions	the Cyclops committed by Odysseus shows his high level of intelligence. Such a <b>simple plan</b> put forth by Odysseus and his men shows their desire to go home" (73).

### Final thought on commentary:

Our comments (commentary) are our chance to help the reader see what we see--that the writer chose his/her words carefully to create meaning and understanding for the reader. We don't want to say the obvious. We want to explain how the particular passage or word helps us understand the writer's purpose.

# Common Commentary Errors

## 1. Commentary is GENERIC:

Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch the coffin in the loft. This was mean of him.  
**He wasn't being very nice.**

**better:** Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch the coffin in the loft. **He didn't care about hurting Doodle's feelings by forcing him to face a symbol of his own death. All he cared about was not feeling ashamed of an invalid brother.**

## 2. Commentary DRIFTS from the topic sentence:

Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch the coffin in the loft. This was mean of him.  
**The coffin wasn't even used.**

**better** Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch the coffin in the loft. This was mean of him. **He wanted to terrorize Doodle by making him realize he wasn't supposed to live.**

## 3. Commentary here is really CONCRETE DETAIL rather than actual commentary:

Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch the coffin in the loft. **They were in the barn when he touched it. The parents had kept the coffin even though they didn't need it.**

**better** Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch the coffin in the loft. **He didn't care about hurting Doodle's feelings by forcing him to face such a symbol of his own death. All he cared about was not being ashamed of an invalid brother.**

## 4. Commentary is REPETITIVE:

Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch his coffin in the loft. **This was cruel of him to do. He didn't have to make Doodle touch the coffin.**

**better** Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch the coffin in the loft. **This was a mean and heartless thing to do to his little brother. All he cared about was not being ashamed of an invalid brother.**

## 5. Commentary is CONTRADICTORY to the topic sentence:

Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch the coffin in the loft. Brother was just embarrassed by Doodle. He didn't really mean to hurt his feelings.

**better** Brother was cruel to Doodle when he was growing up. For example, he made him touch the coffin in the loft. This was a mean and heartless thing to do to his little brother. **All he cared about was not being ashamed of an invalid brother.**

## Example of an effective commentary paragraph:

Though Brother often shows love for Doodle, his cruel streak subconsciously goads him to torture his little brother. For example, after many attempts to leave Doodle behind, Brother takes him up to the barn loft and shows him his coffin, telling him, "Before I'll help you down . . . you're going to have to touch it" (302). He instinctively wants Doodle to know that, even from the beginning, his family has always been prepared for him to die. Even Doodle's own fear has no effect on Brother as his sense of power over one younger and less able comes to fruition.

# Documentation of Sources in Literary Papers: Parenthetical Citations

## The basics:

Usually, all we need is the author's last name and page number.

Example: "Ancient writers attributed the invention of the monochord to Pythagoras in the sixth century BC" (Marouse 197).

**Notice, there is no period after BC and no comma between Marouse and 197.**

In writing about a single work, we use the writer's name in the first citation. Only the page number is needed in the rest of the citations.

Example: "The hills are lovely beyond the singing of it" (Paton 1).

Kumalo reminds his brother "something new is happening here" (35).

## More information:

1. We put the parentheticals at the end of the sentence, unless we cite two or more sources in one sentence. If we do, we place the parenthetical as close to the material it documents as we can, looking for a natural break in the sentence like a comma.

Example: **"I was only fifteen" (Wiesel 65), and that was all the author said until his father "died in his sleep before" Wiesel awoke (76).**

If there is no pause in the sentence, we put the citations at the end of the sentence and separate one from the other with a semicolon.

Example: **"I was only fifteen" Wiesel admits as he watches "the boy die on the gallows" (Wiesel 65; 93).**

2. In citing literary works like novels, plays, or poems, because there are so many editions, we need to give a little more information. So, for novels, we cite the page, then the chapter or section, if they are numbered throughout the novel, separated by a semicolon.

Example: . . . **"in the heart of a woman (Cather 15; pt. 1). -- novel**  
**"This above all to thine own self be true" (Hamlet 2.3.231)**

**--play**

**"One could be worse than a swinger of birches" ("Birches" 58). -- poem**

**If you have any questions about parenthetically citing any work in an essay, please ask. I'll be happy to advise you or consult the MLA for a definitive answer.**