



How to Write a Strong Essay

Principles, Guidelines, and Examples



Quote Incorporation #1

- Introduce the context and speaker of the quote you are using in the sentence.
- Example:
 - When Macbeth first meets the three witches, he exclaims, “Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more” (I.3.70).



Quote Incorporation #2

- Use the quote in the sentence as a description.
- Example:
 - The three apparitions appear as “an Armed Head,” “a Bloody Child,” and “a Child Crowned, with a tree in his hand” (IV.1.68, 76, and 86).



Quote Incorporation #3

- Use part of a quote by omitting material in the middle using an ellipsis in its place.
- Example:
 - When Macbeth hears that Lady Macbeth committed suicide, Macbeth states, “She should have died hereafter; / There would have been a time for such a word . . . Out, out, brief candle! / Life’s but a walking shadow” (V.5.17-24).



Quote Incorporation #4

- Material that is longer than four typed lines should be arranged as a block quote.
 - Step 1: Introduce the block quote with a colon.
 - Step 2: Begin a new line (tap enter)
 - Step 3: Indent one inch from the left margin.
 - Step 4: Type the quote without adding quotation marks.
 - Step 5: Parenthetical citation without a period.



Quote Incorporation #4

- Only one block quote may be used in your essay.
- Example:
 - Lady Macbeth delivers the following soliloquy:

The raven himself is hoarse / That croaks the fatal entrance of
Duncan / Under the battlements. Come, you spirits / That tend
on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me, from the
crown to the toe, top-full / Of direst cruelty! (1.5.36-41)



Properly Identifying an Author and Characters

- The first time you identify an author, you use his or her first and last name. Afterward, you use the last name only.
 - First time: William Shakespeare
 - Remainder of the essay: Shakespeare
 - (never William you do not know him)
- Identify characters as the author identifies the characters. Use that identification throughout your essay.



Third Person Point of View

- In formal essays, you should use third person point of view pronouns. Use “he,” “she,” “they,” “them,” etc.
- Don't use first person pronouns: No “I,” “me,” “my,” “we,” “us,” etc.
- Don't use second person pronouns: No “you” or “your.” Substitute with “one” or “the reader.”



Present Tense

- Use present tense to discuss literature.
 - Examples:
 - Macbeth murders King Duncan.
 - Malcolm becomes king when Macduff defeats Macbeth.
- You may use past tense when discussing historical events.
 - Example:
 - William Shakespeare was most likely born April 23, 1564.



Introductions and Thesis Statements



Strong Introduction Structure

- The first sentence of the introduction paragraph should introduce the author and title of the text.
- The middle provides the reader with plot or historical information which relates to the essay's overall topic.
- The last sentence is the thesis statement, which is strong, clear, and argumentative.



Exemplary Intro. Example

William Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth* tells the story of the titular character Macbeth who receives a prophecy from three witches that he will be king of Scotland. Throughout the play, Macbeth makes terrible decisions in order to ensure that the prophecy comes true, and that no one will take that away from him. As a result of his poor decisions, Macbeth starts on a downward spiral and eventually loses both the throne and his life. The decisions to kill King Duncan and have Banquo and Macduff's family assassinated, represent the devastating steps Macbeth takes toward his ultimate downfall.

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Strong Thesis Statements

- The thesis statement provides the reader with a map for the essay.
- The thesis should include the essay's topic and your argument about that topic represented by 3 subpoints.
- The decisions to kill 1) King Duncan and have 2) Banquo and 3) Macduff's family assassinated, represent the devastating steps Macbeth takes toward his ultimate downfall.
- "The devastating steps Macbeth takes toward his ultimate downfall" is the topic for the essay.
- Subpoints 1, 2, and 3 are the writer's argument and body paragraphs.




Body Paragraphs



Strong Body Paragraph Structure

- T: Topic sentence-A clear and specific statement of what the subject of the paragraph will be.
- E: Evidence-Two quotes that prove the topic sentence is true. The quotes should be specific and strong examples of the topic sentence.
- A: Analysis-An explanation and discussion of how the evidence proves the topic sentence.
- L: Link sentence-A connection to the Topic sentence and a smooth transition to the next paragraph.



Exemplary Body Paragraph Example

The first of Macbeth's devastating steps toward his tragic downfall occurs when he murders King Duncan. Macbeth meets with his wife, Lady Macbeth, after killing King Duncan. Macbeth expresses guilt when he says to himself, "What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes! / Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" (II.2.58-60). He also expresses that "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" (II.2.72). His violent crime which metaphorically stains his hands red forever fills him with so much guilt that he no longer recognizes himself. Clearly, Macbeth's downfall begins with this first murder, but his violent betrayals do not end with King Duncan.

T: Topic sentence-Clearly states that the subject of the paragraph will be Macbeth's murder of King Duncan as one of his steps toward downfall.

E: Evidence-Two quotes that prove Macbeth killing King Duncan is a step toward his downfall: guilt and no longer recognizing himself.

A: Analysis-Explains how the evidence proves King Duncan's murder is a step toward ultimate downfall.

L: Link sentence-Connects to the Topic sentence and transitions to the next paragraph about another violent betrayal—the murder of Banquo.

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Conclusion Paragraph



Strong Conclusion Structure

- First, restate your thesis in a new way.
- Next, summarize the essay's argument.
- Then, address the greater significance of your topic and your argument.
 - By explaining the importance, you are explaining the point or message the author meant to make with the text.



Exemplary Conclusion Example

Macbeth's steps toward his tragic downfall are his decisions to murder King Duncan himself, and then to have Banquo and Macduff's family killed. These murders cause Macbeth to experience extreme guilt, and eventually lead to Macbeth losing his sanity and family. The consequences of these steps may vary, but they all share the fact that they are violent betrayals. Macbeth swears loyalty to King Duncan, while Banquo and Macduff are his friends, but he betrays them by ending their lives. As a result, Macbeth ends his own. Macbeth, like so many others who fall, fails to realize that without friends, all of the power in the world means nothing.

The first sentence restates the essay's thesis in a new way.

The middle of the conclusion summarizes the essay's argument.

The end of the conclusion (and essay overall) addresses the greater significance: Macbeth's downfall results from his decision to betray his friends.

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