
Writing about literature

PID_00249655

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1. Getting started

Having made your way through the critical reading of your assigned text (whether be it a novel, a short story, a poem or a play), the process of literary analysis continues with communicating to others the meaning you, as a reader, have constructed from it. Of all the stages in literary analysis, writing is perhaps the most challenging. It can also be the most rewarding if you know how to approach the task.

Writing about literature is not just an ordeal you undergo for the purpose of assessment. It is essential to the study of literature. Until you are able to use the evidence you have collected from the text to express opinions for yourself, you have not really read the text. The most effective way for your ideas to become a properly functioning part of your critical mind is to discuss them in writing.

A puzzling thing about writing an assignment is that it can be difficult to get a clear idea of what is wanted from you. That is why your first task as a writer is to inspect your assignment closely and thoroughly to make sure that you fully understand what you are required to do. If you find anything unclear or confusing, pose your questions on the forum so that your course instructor (or classmates) can help you answer them.

Though assignments (CATs) vary from one to another, they all impose certain rules and restrictions, which are not meant to limit your creativity but to channel it and thus help your productivity. Prominent among the restrictions is the word count limit:

- **CAT1:** 100 words for each contribution to the debate (minimum 2 contributions on different days).
- **CAT2:** 400 words for the two-question written exercise based on the novel (a maximum of 200 words for each question, passage apart).
- **CAT3:** 350 words for the critical essay on one of the three short stories.
- **CAT4:** 350 words for the argumentative commentary on one of the poems.
- **CAT5:** 400 words for the two-question written exercise based on the play (a maximum of 200 words for each question, quotation apart).

Keep those limits in mind as you delve into potential topics, making sure that you choose a topic you can treat effectively within the word limit. Some of the CATs will impose further restrictions, sometimes indicating the texts and/

or topics to be explored. As a result, the specific instructions given by each writing assignment will shape your writing process, determining, for example, whether you should tackle a step such as choosing a text (CAT3 and CAT4) or a passage (CAT2 and CAT5), answering questions (CAT2, CAT3 and CAT5) or identifying a topic/thesis sentence (CAT4).

Writing requires serious effort and plenty of time. Because it is challenging, it is tempting to put it off until the last minute. Do not make the mistake of procrastinating until the night before your CAT is due to be submitted. Make sure you start writing it in advance so as to allow yourself time to reconsider, revise and proofread before submission. To make proofreading easier, always use the spell check in your text processor. There is **no excuse** for submitting written work that contains spelling errors.

2. Linguistic register, tone and audience

Your writing assignment can be done in a less formal or a more formal style. In fact, you will be asked to try your hand at both. The language used in your contributions to the Debate (CAT1) will be generally more formal than the language you use in colloquial English but less formal than the kind of written English you will use to answer the questions (CAT2 and CAT5) or to write the critical essay (CAT3) or the argumentative commentary (CAT4).

As well as considering your language register, you should also bear in mind the tone and the audience. It is obvious that your intended reader will be your course instructor. Yet always try to imagine an ideal reader: for example somebody whom you respect but who often sees things differently from you. Use a serious and straightforward tone so as to capture and grasp this person's attention and respect. Remember that clarity and eloquence are essential when writing about literature, and adopting a distinctive and engaging tone is one of the aims of academic writing.

3. Using Textual Evidence in Writing Assignments

Although the purpose of your writing assignments is to develop and present your ideas about the text in your own words (see section 3.3 “Avoiding Plagiarism”), a selective (and judicious) use of textual evidence can illuminate and support your claim and make it more convincing. However, you should be careful when paraphrasing, summarizing or using direct quotations. You do not want your written production to be simply a compilation of other people’s ideas. Those ideas should only be introduced in order to shape and anticipate your argument, which is both the essence and the point of the writing assignment. The more efficient the use of textual evidence, the more successful your claim will be. Your clarity and reliability as a writer will depend on how sensibly and elegantly you combine other people’s words and your own.

3.1. Quoting, Paraphrasing and Summarizing

This section aims to guide your use of quotations, paraphrases, and summaries. Whether you use one or another depends on your preference, on convenience, and on how close you feel as a writer to the textual evidence. You might use them to:

- provide support for claims or add credibility to your writing;
- refer to work that leads up to the work you are now doing;
- give examples of several points of view on a subject;
- call attention to a position that you wish to agree or disagree with;
- highlight a particularly striking phrase, sentence, or passage by quoting the original;
- distance yourself from the original by quoting it in order to cue readers that the words are not your own;
- expand the breadth or depth of your writing.

Note

This section is adapted from “Quoting, Paraphrasing and Summarizing” (Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab): <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/>; Sharon J. McGee (2002), *Analyzing Literature: A Guide for Students*, New York: Longman; and Alison Booth and Kelly J. Mays, “Writing about Literature” (LitWeb: the Norton Introduction to Literature StudySpace): <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/litweb10/writing/welcome.aspx>.

3.1.1. Quotations

Quotations must be identical to the original, using a narrow segment of the source. They must match the source document word for word and must be attributed to the original author.

Advice on Using Quotations

- Ask yourself the following questions before introducing somebody else's words into your literature assignment: "How well does the quotation illustrate or support my analysis? Is this quotation the best evidence of the point I am making? Why am I quoting the text instead of paraphrasing or summarising it?" (Rosa and Eschholz, 2003, p. 169).
- Always use quotations marks to identify text copied/quoted from other texts, except in the case of lengthy quotations, which should be separated from the body of the text.
- Use "signal phrases" to introduce quotations and integrate them into the flow of your writing. You may find it useful to consult the following list of verbs provided by Rosa and Eschholz (p. 168):

*Acknowledges	*Insists
*Adds	*Points out
*Admits	*Reasons
*Believes	*Reports
*Compares	*Responds
*Confirms	*Suggests
*Declares	*Grants
*Endorses	*Implies

- Every quotation needs to have your own words appear in the same sentence. Here are some easy to use templates for doing this type of introduction:

X states, "_____."

As the world-famous scholar X explains it, "_____."

As claimed by X, "_____."

In her article _____, X suggests that "_____."

In X's perspective, "_____."

X concurs when she notes, "_____."

- Now that you have successfully used the quotation in your sentence, it is time to explain what that quotations means – either in a general sense or in the context of your argument. Here are some templates for explaining quotations:

In other words, X asserts _____.
 In arguing this claim, X argues that _____.
 X is insisting that _____.
 What X really means is that _____.
 The basis of X's argument is that _____.

- Use an ellipsis if you omit any words from the original source you are quoting. Ellipses can be used at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the quotation, depending on where the missing words were originally. An ellipsis is formed by either three or four full stops with a space between each.
- If any words are added to a quotation in order to explain who or what the quotation refers to, you must use brackets to distinguish your addition from the original source.
- When you refer to a complete volume (novel, play, monograph) use italics, e.g. *The Buddha of Suburbia*. When you refer to a complete short text (poem, article, short story) use quotation marks without italics, e.g. "Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples".
- Include a **Works Cited** or **References** page at the end of your assignment if you quote from other sources.

Quoting from Novels or Short Stories (CAT2 and CAT3)

- If the quote is three typed lines or less, you can integrate it into the paragraph by placing it in quotation marks. If it is necessary to include a parenthetical page number, put the author's surname and page number in parentheses followed by a full stop:

"In walks these three girls in nothing but bathing suits", begins John Updike's short story "A & P" (Surname page#).

- If you want to quote words or a phrase, not a complete sentence, from a text, simply put the word or phrase in quotation marks.

In order to execute his revenge on the King and his court, Poe's disabled character Hop Frog "encased [them] in tight-fitting stockinet shirts and drawers. They were then saturated with tar". Later, Hop Frog sets them ablaze (Surname page#).

Notice, also, that in this example it was necessary to add the pronoun "them" in brackets in order for the sentence to make sense.

- If you are quoting material that is more than three typed lines long, you begin the quote on a new line, indented one inch from the margin. Each line of the quote is also indented one inch. Do not use quotation marks with an indented quote. You can either use a colon to introduce the quote or no punctuation. Double space throughout the quote. Unlike quotes that occur within the text, with an indented quote, the parenthetical

See also

Check <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqHusfPzLys> (institutional video with the main indications as to how to write your Works Cited or References).

reference occurs after the full stop at the end of the quote; it is not followed by a full stop.

In Toni Cade Bambara's short story "The Lesson," the main character begins contemplating the consequences of the expensive toys she saw while on a field trip to FAO Schwartz. She thinks

Thirty-five dollars could buy new bunk beds for Junior and Gretchen's boy. Thirty-five dollars and the whole household could go visit Granddaddy Nelson in the country. Thirty-five dollars would pay the rent and the piano bill too. Who are these people that spend that much for performing clowns and \$1000 for toy sailboats? What kind of work they do and how they live and how come we ain't in on it? Where we are is who we are, Miss Moore always pointing out. But it don't necessarily have to be that way, she always adds then waits for somebody to say that poor people have to wake up and demand their share of the pie and don't none of us know what kind of pie she talking about in the first place. (Surname Page#)

Although she begins to contemplate the social and economic plight of her family, in the end, she brushes off this realization.

Quoting from Poetry (CAT4)

- You may quote one to three lines of poetry by placing the line(s) in quotation marks within the text of your paper. Separate lines of poetry using a slash mark (/). Leave a space on either side of the slash. In parentheses, place the line numbers of verse you've quoted.

Emily Dickinson begins her poem "The Brain-is wider than the Sky-" with her characteristic use of punctuation and capitalization: "The Brain-is wider than the Sky- / For-put them side by side- / The one the other will contain" (1-3).

- When citing more than three lines of poetry, begin the verse on a new line, indented one inch. Double-space the indented quote. As with novels and short stories, do not use quotation marks and place the parenthetical reference with line numbers after the full stop or other mark of punctuation. Reproduce the lines as they appear in the poem, breaking for a new line as the poem does even if there is more space left on your line. If the line of poetry is too long to fit, you continue on the next line, but indent an additional three spaces. When beginning the following line, come back to your original one-inch indentation. If you begin your quote somewhere in the line other than the beginning, indent the first line the approximate number of spaces to replicate where in the line you are beginning.

Poet Langston Hughes broke with African-American poetic tradition by writing about jazz and racial issues and by using the language of the common person instead of lofty literary language. These lines from his work "Lenox Avenue: Midnight" reflect both his choice of topic and his use of language:

The rhythm of life
Is a jazz rhythm,
Honey.
The gods are laughing at us. (1-4)

- If the poem uses unusual spacing, try to replicate that spacing as closely as possible in your indented quotation.

Poet Nazik Al-Mala'ika uses unusual spacing to structure his poem "I Am."

The night asks me who I am
Its impenetrable black, its unquiet secret
I am

Its lull rebellious. (1-4)

Quoting from a Play (CAT5)

If you quote from a play, you will most likely be quoting dialogue from two or more characters. After indenting one inch, you must include each character's name in all capital letters followed by a full stop. Start the speech on the same line. Begin each subsequent line of the character's speech indented an additional three spaces. When a new character begins speaking, return your indentation to the original one-inch indentation mark and follow the same process as before, indenting subsequent lines three spaces. In parentheses provide the act and scene numbers (and line numbers if the play is in verse).

In Much Ado About Nothing, Benedick reflects on what he has overheard Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio say:

This can be no trick. The conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady. It seems her affections have their full bent. Love me? Why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured. They say I will bear myself proudly if I perceive the love come from her; they say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. (2.3.217–24)

3.1.2. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing involves putting a passage from source material into your own words. A paraphrase must also be attributed to the original source. Paraphrased material is usually shorter than the original passage, taking a somewhat broader segment of the source and condensing it slightly. The following examples offer paraphrases of sentences from a work of fiction (Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*) and a poem (W. B. Yeats's "All Things Can Tempt Me").

Original sentence

- It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.
- All things can tempt me from this craft of verse: One time it was a woman's face, or worse- The seeming needs of my fool-driven land; Now nothing but comes readier to the hand Than this accustomed toil....

Paraphrase

- Everyone agrees that a propertied bachelor needs (or wants) to find a woman to marry.
- Anything can distract me from writing poetry: One time I was distracted by a woman's face, but I was even more distracted by (or I found an even less worthy distraction in) the attempt to fulfil what I imagined to be the needs of a country governed by idiots. At this point in my life I find any task easier than the work I'm used to doing (writing poetry).

3.1.3. Summarizing

Summarizing involves putting the main idea(s) into your own words, including only the main point(s). Once again, it is necessary to attribute summarized ideas to the original source. Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and take a broad overview of the source material.

Summarizing entails prioritizing, or highlighting, some ideas or elements of the plot over others. As a result, the summary will reflect your own point of view and, therefore, your own interpretation or argument. For this reason, when you summarize a literary text you may be starting to figure out what your interpretation of the text will be and how it will differ from those of other readers. Here for example, for example, are three viable one-sentence summaries of *Hamlet*:

A young man seeking to avenge his uncle's murder of his father kills his uncle, while also bringing about his own and many others' deaths.

A young Danish prince avenges the murder of his father, the king, by his uncle, who had usurped the throne, but the prince himself is killed, as are others, and a well-led foreign army has no trouble successfully invading the decayed and troubled state.

When, from the ghost of his murdered father, a young prince learns that his uncle, who has married the prince's mother, is the father's murderer, the prince plots revenge, feigning madness, acting erratically – even insulting the woman he loves – and, though gaining his revenge, causes the suicide of his beloved and the deaths of others and, finally, of himself.

3.2. Expressing your Opinion

3.2.1. CAT1: Debate Contributions

Make a minimum of **two** contributions on different dates to the online debate based on the readings assigned for Unit 1 (Check 2.1 and 2.2 for linguistic register, tone and word limits).

Rules for Online Debate

- This is a shared learning environment, so try not to lurk in the cyberspace background. That is, it is not enough to login and read the discussion thread of others. For the maximum benefit to all, everyone must contribute, including yourself.
- Make sure you contribute new ideas, doing more than simply reflecting or commenting on those offered by your classmates.
- Bear in mind that the main objective of the debate is not to reach unanimous agreement but to develop a collective argument.

Note

This section is adapted from "Netiquette: Ground Rules for Online Discussions" by Peter Connor (Colorado State University): <http://teaching.colostate.edu/tips/tip.cfm?tipid=128>

- Be brief. You want to be clear, and to articulate your point, without being preachy or pompous. Be direct. Stay on point. Do not lose yourself, or your readers, in overly wordy sentences or paragraphs.
- Use proper writing style. Correct spelling, grammatical construction and sentence structure are expected in every other writing activity associated with scholarship and academic engagement. Online discussions are no different.
- Cite your sources. If your contribution to the conversation includes the intellectual property (authored material) of others (books, newspapers, magazines, journal articles or websites), they must be given proper attribution. But remember that you should only resort to other sources or quotations to support your claim. Your opinions must always be your own.
- Emoticons and texting: Social networking and text messaging has spawned a body of linguistic shortcuts that are not part of the academic dialogue. Please refrain from :-) faces and c u l8r's.
- Respect diversity: It is an ethnically rich and diverse, multi-cultural world in which we live. Use no language that is – or that could be construed to be – offensive toward others. Racist, sexist, and heterosexist comments and jokes are unacceptable, as are derogatory and/or sarcastic comments and jokes directed at religious beliefs, disabilities, and age.
- No YELLING! Step carefully. Beware the electronic footprint you leave behind. Using bold upper-case letters is bad form, like stomping around and yelling at somebody (NOT TO MENTION BEING HARD ON THE EYE).
- No flaming! Criticism must be constructive, good-natured and well-articulated. Please, no tantrums. Rants directed at any other contributor are simply unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The same goes for profanity. The academic environment expects higher-order language.
- Lastly, remember: you cannot un-ring the bell. Language is your only tool in an online environment. Be mindful. How others perceive you will be largely, as always, up to you. Once you've hit the send button, you've rung the bell.
- Review your written posts and responses to ensure that you have conveyed exactly what you intended. This is an excellent opportunity to practice your proofreading, revision, and rewriting skills – valuable assets in the professional world for which you are now preparing.

- Read your post out loud before hitting the send button. This will tell you a lot about whether or not your grammar and sentence structure are correct, your tone is appropriate and your contribution is clear.

Useful Expressions for Discussion and Debate

Presenting an argument

- The main thing is...
- The most important thing is...
- Primarily, ...
- Most importantly, ...

Presenting a number of arguments

- First of all, ...
- Firstly, ...
- Well, firstly...
- To begin with, ...
- I'd start by...
- For a start, ...
- There are two points here.
- Firstly, ...
- Secondly, ...
- There are two problems here...
- Moreover, ...
- You also have to consider...

Note

This section is adapted from "Expressions for Discussion and Debate": <http://lewebpedagogique.com/megsblog/files/2009/09/Expressions-for-Discussion-and-Debate-new.pdf>

Adding an argument

- Also, ...
- Again, that depends on...
- In addition, ...
- What's more, ...
- I might add that...
- Perhaps I should also mention...
- Not to mention the fact that...
- Plus the fact that...
- Not only that, but...

Expressing a strong opinion

- In my opinion, ...
- In my view, ...
- In my reckoning, ...
- I strongly believe in...
- I definitely think that...
- Well, if you ask me, ...
- Well, I think...
- I believe...
- I strongly believe...
- I have a reason to believe...
- I'm sure that...
- I'm pretty sure that...

Expressing certainty

- According to the author's opinion, ...
- Actually, ...
- In fact, ...
- Clearly, ...
- Obviously, ...
- People have always...
- People just won't continue to...
- Without doubt, ...
- There's no doubt that...
- Undoubtedly, ...
- Surely, ...

Expressing complete agreement

- You're right.
- That's true!
- I couldn't agree with you more.
- I'm with you on that.
- That's just what I was thinking.
- That's exactly what I think.
- That's a good point.
- That's just how I see it.
- My feelings exactly.

Delaying Strategies

- That's a very good question. The reality is that...
- Well, it depends on what you mean...
- Well, if you ask me, it all depends on your circumstances...

Disagreeing diplomatically (through doubt)

- I wonder whether that's the case.
- I'm not sure (that) it works like that.
- I'm not so sure about that.
- I'm not so certain.
- Well, I'm not sure whether you can really...
- Well, I don't know...
- Well, it depends...
- I'm inclined to disagree with that...

Illustrating a point

- For example, ...
- For instance, ...
- Take for example...
- A classic example of this is...
- A classic example of this would be...
- To illustrate my point...
- Let me give you an example...

Clarifying an opinion

- Here I'm referring to...
- Let me clarify that...
- By this I mean that...
- To be more precise, ...
- That is to say, ...

Disagreeing in part (appeal to logic)

- Not necessarily, ...
- That doesn't necessarily follow.
- That's not necessarily true.
- That isn't strictly true.

3.2.2. CAT2 and CAT5: Answering Questions Based on Text Commentary

Select passages from a novel/play to answer TWO questions commenting on these passages. Being selective and capable of synthesizing your thoughts is extremely important (Check 2.1 and 2.2 for linguistic register, tone and word limits).

Instructions

- Before reading the texts, look at some of the recommended websites on your classroom webpage to find background information on the author and about the texts themselves.
- Scrutinize the questions. Make sure you understand what you are required to do. If still in doubt, pose your question on the forum so that everyone can profit from your instructor's/classmates' replies.
- Read the texts, selecting possible passages for the exercises.

- Think about highlighting or underlining passages which would help you answer the questions.
- Although you have been assigned specific questions for discussion, the interest and effectiveness of your answers will largely depend on whether or not you can make the questions your own, turning them into questions to which you discover your own answer.
- Do not hesitate to use the recommended guides and notes.
- Use the dictionary only occasionally, if you cannot understand the meaning of a whole paragraph or page.
- Consult a translation of the text, particularly for Shakespeare's play, if necessary.
- Copy the passages selected in the exercises and identify them by page (in the case of the novel) or by act, scene and lines (in the case of the play). Use parentheses, e.g. (2.iii 10-13).
- Do not focus on more than ONE passage. It will NOT result in higher marks.
- It is not obligatory to quote from secondary sources (i.e. bibliography), but if you do so, remember to identify these using footnotes/references.
- Assessment will be based on how convincing your arguments are. Your instructor may, therefore, disagree with your opinion but still give you high marks.
- Although no opinion will be regarded as incorrect, in certain cases a specific interpretation of the texts may indeed be incorrect, resulting in the mark for this exercise being 'fail'.

3.2.3. CAT3: Critical Essay

Choose ONE of the three short stories and write a critical essay based on the assigned topics. Being selective and capable of synthesizing your thoughts is extremely important (Check sections 1 and 2 for linguistic register, tone and word limits).

Elements of the Critical Essay

The critical essay is a genre of essay that requires you to investigate an idea, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument concerning that idea in a clear and concise manner. This can be accomplished through comparison and contrast, definition, example, the analysis of cause and effect, etc.

Note

This section is adapted from "Argumentative Essays" (Purdue University's Online Writing Lab): <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/05/>

The structure of the critical essay is held together by the following:

- **A clear, concise, and defined thesis statement that occurs in the first paragraph of the essay.** It is essential that this thesis statement be appropriately narrowed to follow the guidelines set forth in the assignment. If you do not master this portion of the essay, it will be quite difficult to compose an effective or persuasive essay.
- **Clear and logical transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion.** Transitions are the mortar that holds the foundation of the essay together. Without logical progression of thought, the reader is unable to follow the essay's argument, and the structure will collapse.
- **Body paragraphs that include evidential support.** Each paragraph should be limited to the exposition of one general idea. This will allow for clarity and direction throughout the essay. What is more, such conciseness creates an ease of readability for one's audience. It is important to note that each paragraph in the body of the essay must have some logical connection to the thesis statement in the opening paragraph.
- **Evidential support (whether factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal).** Sometimes you are required to write critical essays with little or no preparation; typically such essays do not allow for a great deal of statistical or factual evidence.
- **A bit of creativity!** Though creativity and artfulness are not always associated with essay writing, it is an art form nonetheless. Try not to get stuck on the formulaic nature of expository writing at the expense of writing something interesting. Remember, though you may not be crafting the next great novel, you are attempting to leave a lasting impression on the people evaluating your essay.
- **A conclusion that does not simply restate the thesis, but readdresses it in light of the evidence provided.** It is at this point of the essay that students will inevitably begin to struggle. This is the portion of the essay that will leave the most immediate impression on the mind of the reader. Therefore, it must be effective and logical. Do not introduce any

new information into the conclusion; rather, synthesize and come to a conclusion concerning the information presented in the body of the essay.

The five-paragraph essay

A common method for writing a critical essay is the five-paragraph approach. This is, however, by no means the only formula for writing such essays. If it sounds straightforward, that is because it is; in fact, the method consists of:

- an introductory paragraph;
- two/three evidentiary body paragraphs (depending on your word limit);
- a conclusion.

Sample essay

Read the sample essay before you write your own essay. The comments in bold are intended to show you how the essay is structured.

Name: Clara Pérez

Topic: Comment on the narrator's powers of observation in Graham Greene's short story "The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen".

Title: The Invisible Narrator: The Narrator as Secret Protagonist in "The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen" By Graham Greene. [NOTE: the title chosen by the student presents the thesis argued in the essay: the apparently invisible narrator is actually the protagonist of the text. As you can see, the title of the essay plays with the word 'invisible' in the original title of the story and is intended to catch the attention of the reader.]

Greene's short story "The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen" is narrated by an anonymous witness who reports a private conversation between a new writer – a young girl – and her sceptical fiancé. The story deals apparently with her limited powers of observation but when we learn that the narrator is also a writer, we realise that his powers of observation are actually Greene's main theme. The narrator, in short, is the story's secret protagonist. [NOTE: the introduction refers to the topic of the essay, and presents a thesis in relation to it.]

Greene suggests that, ironically, both the narrator and the girl's fiancé have greater powers of observation than her, though she has been praised by her editor for them. Her powers are questioned since she, but not the narrator or her fiancé, fails to notice the colourful group of Japanese businessmen having dinner next to her table. No doubt, she is too engrossed by her dream of future success and by the discussion of her boyfriend's professional prospects to notice them. We should wonder, though, whether a writer must be alert to his or her surroundings even in private moments. Perhaps, the fiancée

notes the Japanese after all, because, as she complains, “Sometimes you are so evasive I don’t think you want to marry me at all”. (64) **[NOTE: this paragraph presents the first important argument in the essay, which is expressed in the first sentence, or ‘topic sentence’. The rest of the paragraph is devoted to explaining this idea with the support of a quotation from the story.]**

The narrator punctuates the story with observations about what the Japanese are doing, activities he follows without missing the couple’s conversation. He seems to feel a certain professional fellowship with the girl and mentally asks her if she is “prepared for the years of effort” (63) and to accept the fact that “those ‘powers of observation’ will become enfeebled”. (63) We deduce that the narrator was, like the girl, admired as a young writer but, in his forties now, he is judged by “performance and not by promise”. (63) From this point of view, the story could be read as a declaration that his performance is still good and so are his powers of observation. **[NOTE: this paragraph presents the second important argument in the essay; the ‘topic sentence’ goes in pursuit of the thesis. The rest of the paragraph contains a series of quotations leading to a provisional conclusion.]**

In conclusion, Greene’s narrator is the actual protagonist of this short story. By showing that he can simultaneously follow the couple’s conversation and the Japanese gentlemen’s business celebration, he proves that he is a good writer, presumably unlike the girl. **[NOTE: this paragraph sums up the arguments presented in the previous three paragraphs, emphasizing the thesis. It does not contain any new ideas.]**

Use of Transition Words

Transitions are phrases or words used to connect one idea to the next. You will use them to help your reader progress from one significant idea to the next and to show the relationship within a paragraph (or within a sentence) between the main idea and the support you give for those ideas.

Here are a few types of transitions:

1) Additive: addition, introduction, similarity to other ideas

- Addition: indeed, further, as well (as this), either (neither), not only (this) but also, (that) as well, also, moreover, what is more, as a matter of fact, and, furthermore, in addition (to this), besides (this), to tell you the truth, or, in fact, actually, to say nothing of, too, let alone, much less, additionally, nor, alternatively, on the other hand, not to mention (this).
- Introduction: such as, as, particularly, including, as an illustration, for example, like, in particular, for one thing, to illustrate, for instance, especially, notably, by way of example.

Note

This section is adapted by John A. Dowel from Gregory M. Campbell and Michael Buckhoff’s page on Expository Writing: <https://msu.edu/~jdowell/135/transw.html>

- Reference: speaking about (this), considering (this), regarding (this), with regards to (this), as for (this), concerning (this), on the subject of (this), the fact that.
- Similarity: similarly, in the same way, by the same token, in a like manner, equally, likewise.
- Identification: that is (to say), namely, specifically, thus.
- Clarification: that is (to say), I mean, (to) put (it) another way, in other words.

2) Adversative: signal conflict, contradiction

- Conflict: but, by way of contrast, while, on the other hand, however, (and) yet, whereas, though (final position), in contrast, when in fact, conversely, still.
- Emphasis: even more, above all, indeed, more importantly, besides.
- Concession: but even so, nevertheless, even though, on the other hand, admittedly, however, nonetheless, despite (this), notwithstanding (this), albeit, (and) still, although, in spite of (this), regardless (of this), (and) yet, though, granted (this), be that as it may.
- Dismissal: either way, whichever happens, in either event, in any case, at any rate, in either case, whatever happens, all the same, in any event.
- Replacement: (or) at least, (or) rather, instead.

3) Causal: signal cause/effect and reason/result

- Cause/Reason: for the (simple) reason that, being that, for, in view of (the fact), inasmuch as, because (of the fact), seeing that, as, owing to (the fact), due to (the fact that), in that, since, forasmuch as.
- Condition: on (the) condition (that), granted (that), if, provided that, in case, in the event that, as/so long as, unless, given that, granting (that), providing that, even if, only if.
- Effect/Result: as a result (of this), consequently, hence, for this reason, thus, because (of this), in consequence, so that, accordingly, as a consequence, so much (so) that, so, therefore.

- Purpose: for the purpose of, in the hope that, for fear that, so that, with this intention, to the end that, in order to, lest, with this in mind, in order that, so as to, so.
- Consequence: under those circumstances, then, in that case, if not, that being the case, if so, otherwise.

4) Sequential: chronological or logical sequence

- Numerical: in the (first, second, etc.) place, initially, to start with, first of all, secondly, thirdly (etc.), to begin with, at first, for a start, secondly.
- Continuation: subsequently, previously, eventually, next, before (this), afterwards, after (this), then.
- Conclusion: to conclude (with), as a final point, eventually, at last, last but not least, in the end, finally, lastly.
- Digression: to change the topic, incidentally, by the way.
- Resumption: to get back to the point, to resume, anyhow, anyway, at any rate, to return to the subject.
- Summation: as was previously stated, so, consequently, in summary, all in all, to make a long story short, thus, as I have said, to sum up, overall, as has been mentioned, then, to summarize, to be brief, briefly, given these points, in all, on the whole, therefore, as has been noted, hence, in conclusion, in a word, to put it briefly, in sum, altogether, in short.

See also

Useful templates for proper use of transitions in your essay:
<http://libguides.csufresno.edu/c.php?g=288903&p=1927133>

3.2.4. CAT4: Writing/Recording a Commentary on a Poem

Write an argumentative commentary (350 words) on ONE of the poems in the document “Poetry”. Record yourself (either on a voice recorder or on camera) reading the poem (in English) and the subsequent commentary (in English, Spanish or Catalan).

You are recommended to take the following points into account when selecting a poem to comment on:

- **Title:** Is it appropriate to the subject, tone and genre? Does it generate interest and hint at the theme the poem is exploring?
- **Subject:** What is the basic situation? Who is talking, and under what circumstances? Try writing a paraphrase to identify any gaps or confusions.

- **Appeal:** Which does the poem appeal to: the intellect or the emotions of the reader?
- **Structure:** What kind of structure(s) has been used in the poem: comparisons, analogies, bald assertions, etc.? Are these aspects satisfyingly integrated? Does the structure support the content?
- **Tone:** What is the poet's attitude to the subject? Is it appropriate to its content and audience: assured, flexible, sensitive, etc.?
- **Word choice:** Is the language used appropriate and uncontrived, economical, varied, inspiring etc.? Do you understand each word properly, including its common uses and associations? Are words repeated? How do they create mood, emotional rapport or distance?
- **Style:** Metaphor and simile: are they used in a fresh and convincing manner? Rhythm and metre: are they well integrated in the structure of the poem? Rhyme: is it fresh, pleasurable, unassuming but supportive?
- **Overall impression:** Is the poem original, honest, coherent, moving etc.? How is the overall effect achieved?

Figures of speech

Are there literary devices being used that affect how you read the poem? (See Unit 1, Section 3 "Terms for Analysing Literature"). If you are interested in the technicalities of English poetry, which are very different from those in Spanish or Catalan, you could look at "About Poetry: English Prosody" at <http://homepage.ntu.edu.tw/~karchung/prosody.htm>.

Sample Essay

When commenting on a poem you must follow a similar format. Avoid descriptive commentaries that follow the structure of the poem stanza by stanza and obey the four/five paragraph rule.

Remember!

STANZA = *estrofa* (each group of lines in a poem)

LINE = *verso* (each single section of the poem, e.g. "a sonnet has 14 lines")

VERSE = *verso* (e.g. "this text is written in verse, not in prose")

Topic: Comment on the poem by Philip Larkin “High Windows”: What’s its main topic?

Title: Looking Beyond Happiness: Philip Larkin’s “High Windows” (1)

In “High Windows” Larkin considers the continuity among the different generations: each has more freedom than the previous one and less than the next. (2) Larkin exposes the envy that his generation feels for the young ones and also how his own generation was envied by his elders. The poem’s conclusion suggests, however, that the poet is reaching an age in which this envy is no longer relevant. (3)

The theme of generational continuity is mirrored by the flowing language. (4) The most effective resource Larkin uses to express his view of time’s passage are the enjambments linking the lines and the five stanzas of “High Windows”. The three parts of the poem do not even coincide with the end of lines or stanzas, increasing this impression of continuity. The lines about the young couple occupy the first two stanzas and half of the first line of the third stanza, where the second part – dealing with the previous generation – begins. The last section, the final mysterious reference to the high windows, begins in the middle of the last line of the fourth stanza.

The poem suggests that liberation is always positive: each generation breaks taboos regarding sex or religion that affected negatively its predecessors. (5) The use of colloquialisms in the first stanza (“kids”, “fucking”) also stresses the impression of constant evolution, for this is the language of the youngest generation. Yet Larkin’s own envy of the sexual freedom of the “kids” is perceptible in these colloquial words. Apparently, he believes young people can’t love – only “fuck” – which highlights the generational gap. The use of “bloody” (line 16) in association with the previous generation also hints at the negative effects of envy.

The poem ends with an image seen through the high windows: “the deep blue air, that shows / Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless”. We can think that these are, literally, the windows through which the poet is watching the young couple or, metaphorically, the windows through which he contemplates life and time. The endless air and blue sky possibly signify his own liberation from the passage of time and, perhaps, from envy itself. (6)

Notes on the essay

(1) The title of the essay has two parts and always refers to the text and/or author. In the first part, the thesis is presented: This is a poem that looks beyond happiness.

(2) This is the THESIS on which the reading of the poem is based.

(3) As you can see, the whole introduction tells you how to read the poem, from the point of view of the author of the essay (there may be other readings).

(4) The topic sentence announces the theme of the first paragraph.

(5) Same comment.

(6) Here the author of the essay uses the last stanza for the basis of his conclusion. Notice, however, that he does not use the two main paragraphs to comment on the poem stanza by stanza but to offer his argumentation about it.

3.3. Avoiding Plagiarism

Academic writing is filled with rules that writers, particularly beginners, are not aware of or do not know how to follow. Many of these rules have to do with proper citation. Gaining familiarity with these rules, however, is critically important, as inadvertent mistakes can lead to charges of plagiarism, which is **the uncredited use (both intentional and unintentional) of somebody else's words or ideas**.

A charge of plagiarism can have severe consequences, including failing the subject or expulsion from university, not to mention the writer's loss of credibility and professional standing.

Note

This section is adapted from "Avoiding Plagiarism" (Purdue University's Online Writing Lab): <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/1/>

Important!

How to Avoid Plagiarism (Information on what plagiarism is and how you can avoid it)

http://biblioteca.uoc.edu/prestatgeries/monografic/HOW_TO_AVOID_PLAGIARISM.pdf

Students Regulations (these regulations cover the general application and development of students' rights and obligations as established by the university's Organizational and Operational Regulations, and establish the mechanisms to guarantee their proper application and protection):

https://seu-electronica.uoc.edu/portal/_resources/CA/documents/seu-electronica/Art_Ins_12_Normativa_drets_i_deuresxcorrectex.pdf

PacPlagi (Service developed by the UOC with the aim of detecting signs of plagiarism in the work handed in by students):

<http://biblioteca.uoc.edu/en/resources/resource/pacplagi>

How can the UOC be sure it is the student doing the work?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GIHBvVD-jc