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HOW TO WRITE A LITERATURE ESSAY

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How to start- understand the question

1. Underline the important instructional words in the essay question.
2. Make sure that you understand the question.
3. When you understand the topic, you can now start planning.
4. If needed, decide on your stance/ argument/ position (whether you agree or disagree with the statement).

Planning phase- what to do.

- **Brainstorm all your ideas**
 - Write down everything you think answers the essay questions.
 - In argumentative essays, write down all the reasons why you agree or disagree with topic/ statement.
- **Structure your ideas:**
 - Once you have all of your ideas, you can start evaluating which ones you think will be best for your topic.
 - Eliminate ideas that will not work.
- **Prepare your evidence:**
 - Next to each of your major points put examples from the novel/ play that support your argument. **NB** Ask yourself if this point/idea answers the essay question. **NB**
- **Decide on paragraphs:**
 - Put your ideas in an order. Each major point/idea should form one paragraph.
- **Structure your paragraph like this :**
 - **P:** Point – state your point
 - **E:** Explain your point
 - **E:** Provide evidence/ examples from the play/ novel
 - **R:** Relate your point back to the essay question.

Keep the
essay question
in your mind
at all times

Writing phase- what to do.

Introductory paragraph:

- Rewrite the essay topic in your own words and if arguing, state your stance (say whether you agree or disagree).
- Briefly mention the points you will give in support of your stance on the topic.
- NO "I" language – Do not say "In this essay I.... ☹" rather say, "This essay will explore..."

Here is an example of an introductory paragraph:

Science and religion are both important factors in the "Life of Pi" novel and they were both needed by Pi in order to survive being lost at sea for 227 days. This essay will explore the role that both science and religion played in Pi's life and survival at sea.

Body paragraphs:

- ALWAYS start out by **defining any words, themes or concepts** as you understand them.
- Have **one paragraph for each major point**.
- **Never retell the whole story**. Only retell the bits of the story (examples) that back up your point and say something like this " this example shows us that..." and relate that example back to your point and the essay question.
- Make sure that **each paragraph follows the PEER outline**.

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An example of PEER in action.

Point

Students are exhausted

Explanation

Students have a lot of homework which takes up three to four hours extra a night. This means that students end up going to bed much later than they should, which in turn means they wake up tired and cannot concentrate in class.

Evidence

Ask any teacher who works at a school and they will tell you that in every class there is at least one student who is sleeping. Additionally if one were to ask every student how he or she were feeling that day, they would undoubtedly answer "tired".

Relate it back to the essay topic

Thus we can see how detrimental extra hours of homework are for both the student, who cannot concentrate owing to tiredness and teacher who becomes frustrated with tired students who undoubtedly do not have energy to work.

Concluding paragraph:

- **Never introduce new facts into your conclusion.**
- Here briefly say what you covered in your essay, and what you have now "shown" the reader. (Sum up your argument)
- Never put in rhetorical questions in your conclusion.

Here is an example of a concluding paragraph:

Pi uses his love of religion and zoology to create a "better" story of his survival that helps him separate himself from the savage things he has to do in order to survive. His zoological knowledge helps him cope and he uses animals to express the emotional truth of the story instead of relaying a traumatic story filled with "dry, yeastless factuality".

Remember

- **Always give your essay a title.**
- **Write out numbers under twenty.** E.g: I had two weeks to prepare NOT I had 2 weeks to prepare ☹
- **Always write in the present tense.**
- **When you mention the name of a play or a novel, put it in inverted commas.**
- **In plays you speak about the audience, in novels you speak about the reader.**
- **Your language must be formal. (No abbreviations, slang or colloquialism)**
- **Do not write conversationally** (E.g. So now you guys see ☹)
- **DO not write in the first person** (" I think ..." rather say "so one can see...")
- **Your tone (your attitude to the subject) must be appropriate** – don't sound arrogant and don't attack.
- **You may make use of rhetorical questions.** (E.g. Why must looking after the house be considered a woman's job? Why do people assume that men are not nurturing?)
- **If needed, place points/facts in chronological order.**
- **Make sure that your paragraphs flow from one into the other.**
- Use words like "Also/ Furthermore/In Addition / Moreover" if you want to add to a point that you made in the previous sentence.
- Use words like " Contrary/ However/ Conversely/ in opposition/ On the other hand" if you want to use the word "but" to start a sentence.

