

1. What is a literary essay?

A short written composition that articulates, supports, and develops one major idea or claim.

It provide analysis of the text and an argument or claim about the text.

Elements of a literary essay:

- **Tone:**
 - tone and audience are connected (publics).
 - Your public is a scientific coterie of literary critics.
 - Formality, respectfulness, care.
 - Writing in the present tense.
 - Using the word I carefully
- **Thesis**
 - The governing idea or claim.
 - A proposition you can prove with evidence from the text.
 - Do not confuse factual statements with a thesis.
 - You need to make interpretative claims, not evaluative claims. How a literary text works and with what effects.
- **Motive**
 - Often a thesis responds to other implied or stated theses: to other readings and interpretations.
- **Evidence**
 - Refers to the determination of the facts.
 - However, a fact demands interpretation.
 - Quotation:
 - Paraphrase:
 - Summary:
 - Description:
- **Structure**
 - Intro/body/conclusion
 - Intro: articulate thesis and motive and any relevant information. Avoid vapid generalizations and truisms and clichés.
 - The body: Each body paragraph needs to develop and support one specific claim. Claim should be stated fairly early in the paragraph in a topic sentence. Each paragraph functions like a miniature essay, with its own intro, body, and conclusion.
 - Each paragraph should build on the last, following in a logical sequence. The paragraphs should flow from one to the other smoothly.
- **Conclusion**
 - Conclusions are introductions in reverse.
 - Effective conclusions consider implications of the essay claim and argument.
 - Although literature essays should be primarily interpretative, conclusions are a good place to move to evaluation.
 - Areas of ambiguity or unresolved questions.

- Essay types:
 - Comparative essay: important to achieve the right balance between comparison and contrast, between pointing out similarities and differences. Often you must establish some similarities in a type of literature (say, Romantic literature), in order to form a ground against which you can draw out contrasts. Possible organizational structure for the comparative essay: block method, or point by point method (see “literature research essay” in Norton).