

Academic Essay

Instructions and how to avoid common mistakes.

Common Mistakes

- Personal Pronouns (I, you, we, etc.) must not be used in an academic essay.
- Quotations MUST be used for evidence to back up opinions.
- Quotations MUST have the source cited properly every time. MLA formatting requires: (1) Author's last name and (2) the page number. (Wilde 1). IF the same author and source (story/book) is used the entire time, the student may use the page number only in the parenthesis after the first occasion.
- Note that the essay is an academic essay, not a personal conversation. Avoid any vocabulary which is informal or conversational. Ex. "So now ...", "I just think ...", "It is my opinion" etc.
- Note the purpose of the essay and remember that in an academic essay the student is stating a thesis (claim/position) and then backing that up with organized evidence which always has a position in each paragraph and backed up by evidence (quotations and proper MLA formatted citation).
- The THEME is a single sentence which states clearly and universally the life lesson that the CHARACTER learned (evidenced through their change) OR the reader learned by the absence of the character learning such a lesson. Example: "Being true to one's self is the highest duty that a person must live and die for."

- First paragraph - thesis/position/claim that you intend to prove throughout the following paragraphs. For a character analysis it is the theme. To format the first paragraph do the following:

First paragraph

The _____ by _____
(genre) (title) (author)

is about _____
(topic/abstract concept) key idea words

and reveals _____ (State the THEME here).

The “theme” is a single sentence that clearly states the life lesson in a general statement without mentioning the character **or** using any 1st/2nd person pronouns (I/you).

Ex. “Memories are the truest treasures of a human life.” **NO CLICHES! (love is blind)**

Supporting Paragraphs

- In a 5 paragraph essay, the 2-4 paragraphs will each begin with a position/thesis statement as to what that paragraph will prove WITHOUT saying, “What I am going to prove now ...”! Ask yourself, what is it you are going to prove and STATE it directly. Ex. “The Young Student was a self indulgent and lazy character who could not escape living in his head and therefore never truly lived a meaningful life.”
- This Topic Sentence statement (in paragraphs 2-4) should be followed up by evidence in the form of quotations/examples taken directly from the story formatted in quotation marks “he flung himself down on the ground and wept.” (Wilde 2) and properly cited.
- Naturally, between the topic sentence statement for each supporting paragraph and the evidence there is room (and necessity) for the writer (you) to have connecting sentences such as “Furthermore, Wilde demonstrates the Young Student’s character defects as the Young Student remains self indulgent, “....” (Wilde 4)
- The final paragraph is very much like your introductory thesis (1st) paragraph in which you re-state the theme, how it was proven, and the author’s aim achieved. Ex. “Being true to oneself in life and death was perfectly revealed in the actions of the Nightingale. Wilde’s fairy tale, The Nightingale and the Rose, turns the reader within to examine whether or not the core convictions one claims are truly worth dying for.”