

Composition Handbook

English Department

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Compiled by

Dr. Nancy S. Beagle

Aided by C. Keeton and K. Johns

Composition Handbook

Before you write an essay, you have to plan it. At SMHS, most English teachers will have you do some brainstorming and ask you to do “Planning Notes” in preparation for writing an essay. Preparing Planning Notes is essentially a way of writing an informal outline for your paper.

Any paper—whether a one-paragraph essay or a complex multi-paragraph essay—will have three basic parts: a beginning (introduction), a middle (the body paragraphs) and a conclusion.

Note:

- In a one-paragraph essay, the terms *topic sentence* and *thesis* are synonymous. They mean the same thing: each is the sentence that provides the main idea of the paper.
- In a multi-paragraph essay, the *thesis statement* is the last sentence in the first paragraph (the introduction) and provides the main idea of the paper. Obviously, the thesis for a multi-paragraph essay will be more complex as it will state the purpose for an extended composition.
- Although you will frequently write four and five-paragraph essays, remember that an essay can be *any* number of paragraphs.

Writing Terminology

Concrete detail (CD)—a concrete detail is a fact or quote from the piece of literature that supports the point you are trying to make. Synonyms for concrete detail include facts, specifics, examples, descriptions, illustrations, support, proof, evidence, quotations, paraphrasing, or plot references. Concrete details are specific details from the work that form the backbone or core of your body paragraphs.

Commentary—this is your discussion, expansion, analysis of the ideas of your concrete detail/quote. Commentary follows your concrete detail. It is *opinion*, not fact. You should employ a *key word* or a *key idea* from your thesis/topic sentence in your commentary so that you are relating your commentary to your thesis/topic sentence. Your commentary should not just paraphrase the idea of the quote. It needs to *extend* the ideas, deepen the ideas. Commentary can also be called opinion, insight, analysis, interpretation, inference, personal response, feelings, evaluation, explication, and reflection.

Conclusion—a conclusion should stress the importance of the thesis statement by restating its ideas. Often a conclusion will also offer a final insight. A conclusion gives the essay a sense of completeness and leaves a final impression on the reader.

Key Word—a key word is a focus word (or words) for your thesis/topic sentences/commentary. A key word usually supports or contains the significant idea of the essay. It is usually a word used in the “B” part of your thesis/topic sentence.

RTT/RTTS – Relate to Thesis/Relate to Topic Sentence—this is an indicator often used by an instructor, recommending that your commentary bear a relation to the topic sentence idea being explored. The commentary for any quote must relate both to the topic sentence of the paragraph in which it occurs and the thesis statement of the essay.

Sub topic—a body paragraph may contain many sub topics. A sub topic will precede a concrete detail. The purpose of a sub topic is to direct the reader to the concrete detail that follows. Synonyms for sub topic include general statement and lead in to quote.

Thesis Statement—a sentence that names the topic of your paper and contains an *interpretive assertion* about your topic. In other words, you are saying something about the topic that is an opinion-based statement about the meaning of the work. A thesis statement is *debatable*. It is not merely factual or obvious but requires convincing proof of its validity. It should be specific, expressed in language that focuses on one or more particular aspects of the work rather than a generality. A thesis statement controls everything that goes into your paper. Generally the thesis is the *last* sentence in your introductory paragraph. A thesis statement should contain both “A” and “B” parts—the “A” is the part that names the topic of your paper; the “B” is the *interpretive assertion*, the *so what?*, the *significance* of the topic.

Topic Sentence -- The first sentence in a body paragraph. This must have a subject and opinion for the paragraph. It does the same thing for a body paragraph that the thesis does for the whole essay.

Structure of a Basic Paragraph (For a One-Paragraph Essay)

A one-paragraph essay must

- Begin with a **topic sentence**, a one-sentence “umbrella-like” sentence that tells the readers what to expect in the paragraph. This topic sentence should have both “A” and a “B” parts to it—the “A” giving the basic subject of the essay, the “B” providing the “so what” or “significance” of the topic.
- Follow with 2 or 3 sentences of **background information**—information that briefly tells about setting, plot, character. (Note: in a multi-paragraph essay, the background would be placed in the Introductory paragraph, not in the individual body paragraphs.)
- Develop the main point through examples (**concrete details**) usually in the form of *quotes* from the book or story. These examples are introduced with **sub topics**, **each which uses a key word from the topic sentence**. *Usually you will have at least two or three concrete details in a paragraph.*
- Discuss the *concrete detail*, relating your discussion always to the main idea of your topic sentence. **This is commentary with RTT** (commentary that must relate to the thesis). *Usually the commentary will be at least two sentences.* You need to link ideas clearly, making sure that all the sentences in a paragraph support the topic sentence. *Providing transitions* between what has been read and what is about to be read is also necessary.
- Finish with a **concluding sentence**. This should restate the idea of the topic sentence (using different words), and provide some insight. Essentially this sentence is summarizing what you discussed in your paragraph.

The structure of a Body Paragraph (shown below) may be expanded—more background sentences, more commentary, and more examples may be given.

Sentence 1: Topic Sentence of Paragraph (TS)

Sentences 2-4: Background of story

Sentence 5: Sub topic #1 (ST)

Sentence 6: Introduction to and Concrete Detail #1 (CD)

Sentences 7-8: Commentary (CM) with RTT about CD #1

Sentence 9: Sub topic #2

Sentence 10: Introduction to and Concrete Detail #2

Sentences 11-12: Commentary with RTT about CD #2

Sentence 13: Sub topic #3

Sentence 14: Introduction to and Concrete Detail #3

Sentences 15-16: Commentary with RTT about CD #3
Sentence 17: Concluding Sentence (CS)

The *expansion* of this form generally will come in the introduction to your concrete details (your quotes) or in your commentary. In either of these places you can easily put more information if you have more to say.

Sample Planning Notes-- One Paragraph Essay

Topic: Discuss how Sanger Rainsford changes in the story “The Most Dangerous Game” and why that change is important.

Outline/Planning Notes: Men Into Beasts

Thesis: Sanger Rainsford transforms from a civilized man into a savage, suggesting that survival instinct will ultimately triumph over morality.

Background:

- Author: Richard Connell
- Short Story: “The Most Dangerous Game”
- Brief plot summary: Rainsford, celebrated hunter, falls off yacht, meets General Zaroff, a man who hunts humans.

Sub topic #1: Rainsford--civilized/moral

Concrete Detail: “such a naïve, and . . .mid-Victorian point of view” (26).

Sub topic #2: Survival instinct makes him animal-like/savage

Concrete Detail: Death Swamp: “and like some huge prehistoric beaver, he began to dig” (85)

Sub topic #3: At end--Rainsford civilized to savage

Concrete Detail: “I am still a beast at bay” (38).

Concluding Sentence: No matter how cultivated humans are, if driven by fear, they will transform into beasts to survive.

Sample One Paragraph Essay:

Men Into Beasts

In Richard Connell’s short story “The Most Dangerous Game,” Sanger Rainsford, a celebrated hunter, transforms from a civilized man into a savage, suggesting that survival instinct will ultimately triumph over morality. On the way to the Amazon, Rainsford falls off a yacht and swims to an island where he encounters General Zaroff, an obsessed hunter who hunts humans for sport. Rejecting Zaroff’s proposal to hunt with him, Rainsford is no longer a fellow sportsman; instead, he becomes the prey. In the beginning of the story, Rainsford appears to be a

very civilized man with good morals. When the general laughs at Rainsford's scruples about hunting humans, Zaroff comments that Rainsford has "such a naïve, and ...mid-Victorian point of view" (26). Rainsford's education and culture have deeply embedded ethics as a part of his personality. He is too refined to willingly lower himself to a primitive beast. As the hunt progresses, however, Rainsford is forced to use his primeval, survival instinct, which consequently makes him more animal-like and savage. When Rainsford reaches Death Swamp, a place booby-trapped with quicksand, the softness of the earth gives him an idea "and like some huge prehistoric beaver, he began to dig" (85). Rainsford has resorted to animalistic actions, revealing that it is not enough to survive by only using reason and calculations as a civilized person would. Rainsford is becoming more of an animal because fear and self-preservation, not ethics, are driving him, something he has never faced before. By the end of the hunt, Rainsford has truly transformed from a civilized man to a savage. As Rainsford faces Zaroff in the bedroom, Zaroff admits defeat, but Rainsford says in a low, hoarse voice, "I am still a beast at bay" (38). The once erudite, well-mannered Sanger Rainsford has transformed into a ferocious, merciless savage. No one, not even Rainsford himself, could have predicted this change. Even a scholarly person can morph into a monster if he is facing death. To save his life, Sanger Rainsford must rely on his survival instinct, ultimately converting him, into a savage animal. No matter how cultivated humans are, if driven by fear, they will transform into beasts to survive.

ANALYSIS of One-Paragraph Essay:

Note: *Italicized bolded words illustrate* RTT (Relating to thesis by repeating key words in sub topics and commentary).

(TS) In Richard Connell's short story "The Most Dangerous Game," Sanger Rainsford, a celebrated hunter, transforms from a *civilized* man into a *savage*, suggesting that *survival instinct* will ultimately *triumph* over *morality* (**Background**) On the way to the Amazon, Rainsford falls off a yacht and swims to an island where he encounters General Zaroff, an obsessed hunter who hunts humans for sport. Rejecting Zaroff's proposal to hunt with him, Rainsford is no longer a fellow sportsman; instead, he becomes the prey. (**Sub topic 1**) In the beginning of the story, Rainsford appears to be a very *civilized* man with *good morals*. (**Intro to CD & CD**) When the general laughs at Rainsford's *scruples* about hunting humans, Zaroff comments that Rainsford has "such a naïve, and ...mid-Victorian point of view" (26). (**CM**) Rainsford's education and culture have deeply embedded *ethics* as a part of his personality. (**CM 2**) He is *too refined* to willingly lower himself to a *primitive beast*. (**Sub topic 2**) As the hunt progresses, however, Rainsford is forced to use his *primeval survival instinct*, which consequently makes him more *animal-like* and *savage*. (**Intro to CD & CD**) When Rainsford reaches Death Swamp, a place booby-trapped with quicksand, the softness of the earth gives him an idea "and like some huge prehistoric beaver, he began to dig" (85). (**CM**) Rainsford has resorted to *animalistic* actions, revealing that it is not enough to survive by only using reason and calculations as a *civilized* person would. (**CM 2**) Rainsford is becoming more of an animal because fear and *self-preservation*, not *ethics*, are driving him, a situation he has never faced before. (**Sub topic 3**) By the end of the hunt, Rainsford has truly transformed from a *civilized* man to a *savage*. (**Intro to CD & CD**) As Rainsford faces Zaroff in the bedroom, Zaroff admits defeat, but Rainsford says in a low, hoarse voice, "I am still a beast at bay" (38). (**CM**) The once erudite, *well-mannered* Sanger Rainsford has transformed into a ferocious, merciless *savage*. (**CM 2**) No one, not even Rainsford himself, could have predicted this change. (**CM 3**) Even a *scholarly* person can morph into a *monster* if he is facing death. (**CS**) To save his life, Sanger Rainsford must rely on his *survival instinct*, ultimately converting him, into a *savage* animal. (**CS**) No matter how *cultivated* humans are, if driven by fear, they will transform into *beasts to survive*.

Structure of a Multi-Paragraph Essay

A multi-paragraph analytical essay can vary anywhere from three paragraphs to a hundred and three (or more), but essentially, the structure is very basic:

- I. **Introductory paragraph(s)**
- II. **Body Paragraph(s)**
- III. **Concluding Paragraph(s)**

The multi-paragraph essays you will write in high school will be limited to *one* introductory paragraph, various number of body paragraphs, and *one* concluding paragraph.

Remember that the word *essay* comes from the French verb *essayer* which means “to try.” What you are *trying* to do is persuade or convince the reader of something. Your *thesis statement* is your opinion about an assigned topic, and your *concrete details* are the proofs you are giving to argue your point.

I. **Introductory Paragraph:**

Your introduction is like a signpost or a map at the beginning of a trail. It tells readers where you are going to take them, what ideas you will explore, and what they will see along the way. It should create a feeling of anticipation and interest.

Your introductory paragraph should be a *funnel* paragraph. It should begin with a statement which is intended to *hook* the reader, continue with background information about the story which is slanted to reflect the concerns of your paper, and end with a *thesis*, your statement of purpose for the essay. For most writing tasks, your introduction will be a paragraph of 50 to 150 words.

First Sentence: Your first sentence is a *hook* to engage the reader. It can be

- A general statement about life
- A quotation or a bit of dialogue
- A startling statistic, an unusual fact, or a vivid example
- A paradoxical statement
- A question
- An analogy
- A joke or anecdote
- A definition relevant to the topic

No matter *how* you begin, your beginning must *relate* to whatever you are writing about; your hook cannot just be some random idea that is eye-catching.

For example:

For the essay about the role of the Nurse and the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*:

- ***A rhetorical question:***

Can any action we do have both good and bad consequences? *Or*
Why do the best intentions often backfire? *Or*
When facing the world with a forbidden love, upon whom can one rely?

- ***A controversial/eye-catching statement:***

People can mean well by what they do, but still their actions can cause trouble. *Or*
People often betray each other without meaning to.

- ***A relevant quotation:***

“Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied, / And vice sometime ‘s by action
dignified” (II, 3. 21-22). (*This is the friar speaking in Romeo and Juliet.*)

Second Sentence: Your second sentence should tie your *hook* to the piece of literature you are discussing. This sentence can also begin your background information.

For example: (*example taken from the sample essay below*):

In the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, the two children of feuding houses, Montague and Capulet, fall in love, and in their courtship, they are aided by both the Nurse and the Friar.

Subsequent Background Sentences: Usually your background information should be two or three sentences long. It should essentially summarize the parts of the story relevant to your topic. It may discuss setting, plot, and/or characters necessary to your topic.

Thesis Statement (last sentence of introductory paragraph): Your thesis statement states a claim that will be supported in the body of your paper; it tells the reader what to expect as he reads on. To be effective, a thesis must be an *opinion*, not a fact; it must be limited in scope, not too broad; and *sharply focused*, not too vague. The best kind of thesis says something that matters; it focuses on *why* whatever you are discussing *matters*; it focuses on *significance*.

Your thesis statement should have both an “A” and a “B” parts to it. The “A” part is the basic idea being addressed; the “B” is the “so what” or the significance.

For example: (examples taken from the sample essays included):

From the essay about “The Most Dangerous Game”:

Factual Thesis: In Richard Connell’s short story “The Most Dangerous Game,” Sanger Rainsford, a celebrated hunter, is an evil man. *This statement is both too factual and broad.*

Revised Thesis with no “B”: In Richard Connell’s short story “The Most Dangerous Game,” Sanger Rainsford, a celebrated hunter, transforms from a civilized man into a savage. *This thesis has only the “A” part of the thesis.*

Revised Thesis with both “A” and “B”: In Richard Connell’s short story “The Most Dangerous Game,” Sanger Rainsford, a celebrated hunter, transforms from a civilized man into a savage, suggesting that survival instinct will ultimately triumph over morality. *The underlined portion of this thesis is the “B”; it tells the significance of Rainsford’s change and allows for more meaningful commentary.*

From the essay about *Romeo and Juliet*:

Factual Thesis: The Nurse and the Friar support Romeo and Juliet. *This statement is too factual and broad. You could ask, “So what if they support the couple? Why does it matter?”*

Revised Thesis with no “B”: The Nurse and Friar support the lovers in their marriage, but this same support and love also play a part in their untimely deaths. *This statement is more specific, but has only the “A” part of the thesis. You could still ask, “So what? Why does it matter?”*

Revised Thesis with both “A” and “B”: The Nurse and Friar support the lovers in their marriage, but this same support and love also play a part in their untimely deaths, suggesting even the best intentions can go awry. *The underlined portion of this thesis is the “B”; it explains the significance of the Nurse and Friar’s roles and allows for more meaningful commentary.*

II. Body Paragraph(s)

The body of the essay moves the reader along toward the destination or goal. It usually consists of several paragraphs, each relating to one of the key points you want to show readers along the way.

While drafting the body of an analytical essay, think carefully about your thesis statement. What does the thesis promise readers? Try to keep this focus in mind. You should always *plan* your essays before you start to write them, so that you don’t *lose* your focus while writing.

A body paragraph must begin with a *topic sentence*, a one-sentence “umbrella-like” sentence that tells the readers what to expect in the paragraph. This topic sentence

should contain a key word from the thesis and contain both the “A” and “B” parts. After the topic sentence, you need to develop the main point through examples, usually in the form of *quotes* from the book or story (called *concrete details*). This *concrete detail* must be introduced by a **subtopic** which sets up where you are going by using a **key word** from the thesis or topic sentence. Then you give your **concrete detail—your proof, your example, your quote**. After the concrete detail (quote), you must discuss the quote, relating your discussion always to the main idea of your topic sentence. ***This commentary should be at least two sentences—it should not be FACT.*** Provide transitions between what has been written and what you are writing, so that there is a nice fluidity to your work.

From the essay about *Romeo and Juliet*:

Topic Sentence 1: The Nurse is a confidante and mother figure to Juliet, who will do and say whatever she thinks is best for Juliet, which ultimately leads to tragedy. *Here we see that the entire paragraph will be about the Nurse and her relation to Juliet. We also see the idea that the Nurse’s best intentions go awry, for though she does “whatever she thinks is best for Juliet,” her actions lead “to tragedy.”*

Subtopic: Initially, the Nurse risks her job and acts as a messenger for Juliet. *This subtopic leads the reader from the more general topic sentence, to the specific ideas of how the Nurse functions in Juliet’s life.*

Concrete Detail (quote): After the Nurse’s first meeting with Romeo, the Nurse tells Juliet, “I am the drudge and I toil in your delight” (II, v, 75). *Notice that the quote is introduced, telling when the Nurse says the words, who says the words, and to whom the words are spoken.*

Commentary of two sentences (or more): The Nurse will go to great lengths to help Juliet despite the risk. If she were to be discovered by Juliet’s parents, the Nurse would definitely face harsh consequences alongside Juliet, whom she is trying to help. The Nurse’s intentions are good; she wants only the best for Juliet. *In these three sentences of commentary, the writer is relating back to the topic sentence (and the thesis statement). The key words in this commentary that do this are “despite the risk,” “whom she is trying to help,” and “intentions are good.”*

Subsequently, you would have a 2nd subtopic with its accompanying concrete detail (quote) and commentary. End your paragraph with a concluding sentence (a mini-conclusion).

Your **concluding sentence** for a paragraph should *summarize* what you wrote in the paragraph you are concluding; ***it should not anticipate*** what you are going in the next paragraph.

Follow the structure below for your body paragraphs (expanding where necessary):

Sentence 1: Topic Sentence of Paragraph

Sentence 2: Subtopic #1

Sentence 3: Introduction to and Concrete Detail #1

Sentences 4-5: Commentary with RTT about CD #1

Sentence 6: Subtopic #2

Sentence 7: Introduction to and Concrete Detail #2

Sentences 8-9: Commentary with RTT about CD #2

Sentence 10: Subtopic #3

Sentence 11: Introduction to and Concrete Detail #3

Sentences 12-13: Commentary with RTT about CD #3

Sentence 14: Concluding Sentence

III. Concluding Paragraph(s)

A conclusion is the end of the journey; it looks back on the points you have shown the reader, and reinforces, but does not necessarily repeat, the main idea. A conclusion brings an essay to a satisfying and logical end and must be purposely crafted to give a sense of completeness. The best conclusions evolve naturally out of what has come before and convince the reader that the essay is indeed at an end, not that the writer has simply run out of steam.

Your conclusion should echo your main idea without dully repeating it. Often the concluding paragraph can be relatively short. In addition to echoing your main idea, a conclusion might summarize your main point, or broaden the idea of your essay to show related insight or *universals*. However, avoid introducing new ideas at the end of any essay.

To make the conclusion memorable, consider including a detail, example, or image from the introduction to bring readers full circle: a quotation or bit of dialogue, an anecdote, or a humorous, witty, or insightful comment.

Suggestions for final insights:

- **Answer a “what if” question**
- **Describe a major discovery/result of your findings in your essay.**
- **Apply the “lesson” of the work to a general audience**
- **Pose a speculative question or statement which leave the subject open**
- **Discuss the broader implications or significance of the topic**
- **Return to the theme, question, or image of the opening paragraph**
- **Give an anecdote that illustrates and reinforces the central idea**

AVOID

- **an unnecessary summary of everything you have said,**
- **a final detail that is new to the topic and would be better placed earlier in your essay,**
- **a statement of the obvious,**

- an apology for what has come before: “Although this is a brief and inadequate treatment of so complex a subject, . . .”
- A mechanical summary: “In this paper, I have shown that. . . “

Remember that the conclusion is returning the reader to the general from the specific.

Sample Multi-Paragraph Essay Planning Notes

Topic: Discuss the roles of both the Nurse and the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet* and how their roles contribute to a central message of the play.

Introduction

Background: Tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, children from feuding families fall in love but end up committing suicide.

Thesis: Throughout the story, the Nurse and Friar support the lovers in their marriage, but this same support and love also play a part in their untimely deaths, suggesting even the best intentions can go awry.

Body 1

TS: The Nurse is a confidante and mother figure to Juliet, who will do and say whatever she thinks is best for Juliet, which ultimately leads to tragedy.

Sub topic 1: Nurse risks job when she is Juliet’s messenger.

CD 1: “I am the drudge and I toil in your delight” (III, v, 75)

Sub topic 2: Nurse is protective and acts as a mother.

CD 2: “if you were to deal double with her,/ Truly it were an ill thing to be offered to any/ Gentlewoman, and very weak dealing” (II, iv, 158-160)

Sub topic 3: She says what she thinks is best, hurts Juliet.

CD3: “I think you are happy in this match,/ For it excels your first”

Body 2

TS: The Friar, like the Nurse, is a parental figure towards Romeo who provides the young couple with solutions but is also an unknowing contributor to their deaths.

Sub topic 1: Friar gives advice.

CD 1: “Be patient” (III, iii, 16)

Sub topic 2: Friar acts hastily.

CD 2: “Come, go, good Juliet. I dare no longer stay” (V, iii, 159)

Sample Multi-Paragraph Essay

“A Helping Hand”

When facing the world with a forbidden love, upon whom can one rely? In the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, the two children of feuding houses, Montague and Capulet, fall in love. Faced with various challenges, they get secretly married. When Romeo is subsequently banished, they are unwillingly separated, and through a series of miscommunications, Romeo and Juliet both commit suicide, which ends the family conflict. Throughout the story, the Nurse and Friar support the lovers in their marriage, but this same support and love also play a part in their untimely deaths, suggesting even the best intentions can go awry.

The Nurse is a confidante and mother figure to Juliet, who will do and say whatever she thinks is best for Juliet, which ultimately leads to tragedy. Initially, the Nurse risks her job and acts as a messenger for Juliet. After the Nurse’s first meeting with Romeo, the Nurse tells Juliet, “I am the drudge and I toil in your delight” (II, v, 75). The Nurse will go to great lengths to help Juliet despite the risk. If she were to be discovered by Juliet’s parents, the Nurse would definitely face harsh consequences alongside Juliet, whom she is trying to help. The Nurse’s intentions are good; she wants only the best for Juliet. Additionally, the Nurse is very protective of Juliet, treating her as if she were her own daughter. During her first meeting with Romeo, the Nurse warns him that “if [he] were to deal double with her,/ Truly it were an ill thing to be offered to any/ Gentlewoman, and very weak dealing” (II, iv, 158-160). The Nurse, acting as a mother would, warns Romeo against hurting Juliet and advises him to act like a gentleman. A protective mother never wants to see her daughter get hurt, and the Nurse makes sure Romeo understands that. She also says what she believes is best for Juliet, even when she speaks against Juliet’s wishes. When Lord Capulet announces Juliet’s engagement to Paris, Juliet is very distraught, and when the Nurse says, “I think you are happy in this match,/ For it excels your first” (III, v, 224-225). The Nurse’s intentions are good, as she wants what is best for Juliet, and she does not believe that happiness is possible given the circumstances with Romeo. However, Juliet feels betrayed and loses all trust and respect for the Nurse. In her moment of despair, the Nurse’s advice is the last thing Juliet wants to hear, and her feeling of betrayal prevents her from consulting with the Nurse later when she actually needs help. Although the Nurse truly cares for Juliet, her expressed opinion about Juliet’s future happiness ultimately pushes Juliet away and leads to her demise.

The Friar, like the Nurse, is a parental figure towards Romeo who provides the young couple with solutions but is also an unknowing contributor to their deaths. Throughout the play, the Friar gives many pieces of advice to the young couple. One

very important piece of wisdom that the Friar reiterates to the star-crossed lovers is, “Be patient” (III, iii, 16). The need for patience is a recurring theme throughout the play of which the young couple never take heed. The Friar tells them this because he does not want Romeo and Juliet to make rash decisions and terrible mistakes. However, the Friar himself behaves hastily when he betrays Juliet when she wakes up in the tomb. The Friar is shocked to find Romeo dead, and when Juliet awakens, he hears a noise and says, “Come, go, good Juliet. I dare no longer stay” (V, iii, 159); he then leaves Juliet in the tomb out of fear. Although the Friar has good intentions, once things go wrong, he runs away from the problem and does not take responsibility for his actions. He is willing to lend a helping hand but does not calculate what might go wrong. As a result, the Friar’s well-meaning actions directly lead to the deaths of the couple.

Romeo and Juliet’s love is made possible by the Nurse and Friar, but these key players also share a large part of the blame for the couple’s deaths, contradicting their very intentions. As confidantes, the Nurse and Friar give their help when needed because they care for the young couple, but their actions also lead Romeo and Juliet to make poor decisions. Had the Nurse and Friar acted cautiously throughout the whole story instead, perhaps they could have prevented the tragedy from taking place instead of blindly trying to help.

Analysis of Multi-Paragraph Essay

“A Helping Hand”

(Hook) When facing the world with a forbidden love, who can one rely on?

(Background) In the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, the two children of feuding houses, Montague and Capulet, fall in love. Faced with various challenges, they get secretly married. When Romeo is subsequently banished, they are unwillingly separated, and through a series of miscommunications, Romeo and Juliet both commit suicide, which ends the family conflict. **(Thesis)** Throughout the story, the Nurse and Friar support the lovers in their marriage, but this same support and love also play a part in their untimely deaths, suggesting even the best intentions can go awry.

(TS1) The Nurse is a confidante and mother figure to Juliet, who will do and say whatever she thinks is best for Juliet, which ultimately leads to tragedy. **(Subtopic 1)** Initially, the Nurse risks her job and acts as a messenger for Juliet. **(Introduction to CD & CD1)** After the Nurse’s first meeting with Romeo, the Nurse tells Juliet, “I am the drudge and I toil in your delight” (II, v, 75). **(CM)** The Nurse will go to great lengths to help Juliet despite the risk. **(CM)** If she were to be discovered by Juliet’s parents, the Nurse would definitely face harsh consequences alongside Juliet, whom she is trying to help. **(CM)** The Nurse’s intentions are good; she wants only the best for Juliet. **(Subtopic 2)** Additionally, the Nurse is very protective of Juliet, treating her as if she were her own daughter. **(Intro to CD & CD2)** During her first meeting with Romeo, the Nurse warns him that “if [he] were to deal double with her,/ Truly it were an ill thing to be offered to any/ Gentlewoman, and very weak dealing” (II, iv, 158-160). **(CM)** The Nurse, acting as a mother would, warns Romeo against hurting Juliet and advises him to act like a gentleman. **(CM)** A protective mother never wants to see her daughter get hurt, and the Nurse makes sure Romeo understands that. **(Subtopic 3)** She also says what she believes is best for Juliet, even when she speaks against Juliet’s wishes. **(Intro to CD & CD3)** When Lord Capulet announces Juliet’s engagement to Paris, Juliet is very distraught, and

when the Nurse says, “I think you are happy in this match,/ For it excels your first” (III, v, 224-225). **(CM)** The Nurse’s intentions are good, as she wants what is best for Juliet, and she does not believe that happiness is possible given the circumstances with Romeo. **(CM)** However, Juliet feels betrayed and loses all trust and respect for the Nurse. **(CM)** In her moment of despair, the Nurse’s advice is the last thing Juliet wants to hear, and her feeling of betrayal prevents her from consulting with the Nurse later when she actually needs help. **(CS)** Although the Nurse truly cares for Juliet, her expressed opinion about Juliet’s future happiness ultimately pushes Juliet away and leads to her demise.

(TS2) The Friar, like the Nurse, is a parental figure towards Romeo who provides the young couple with solutions but is also an unknowing contributor to their deaths.

(Subtopic 1) Throughout the play, the Friar gives many pieces of advice to the young couple. **(Intro to CD & CD1)** One very important piece of wisdom that the Friar reiterates to the star-crossed lovers is, “Be patient” (III, iii, 16). **(CM)** The need for patience is a recurring theme throughout the play of which the young couple never take heed. **(CM)** The Friar tells them this because he does not want Romeo and Juliet to make rash decisions and terrible mistakes. **(Subtopic 2)** However, the Friar himself behaves hastily when he betrays Juliet when she wakes up in the tomb. **(Intro to CD & CD 2)** The Friar is shocked to find Romeo dead, and when Juliet awakens, he hears a noise and says, “Come, go, good Juliet. I dare no longer stay” (V, iii, 159); he then leaves Juliet in the tomb out of fear. **(CM)** Although the Friar has good intentions, once things go wrong, he runs away from the problem and does not take responsibility for his actions. **(CM)** He is willing to lend a helping hand but does not calculate what might go wrong. **(CS)** As a result, the Friar’s well-meaning actions directly lead to the deaths of the couple.

(Restatement of Thesis) Romeo and Juliet’s love is made possible by the Nurse and Friar, but these key players also share a large part of the blame for the couple’s deaths, contradicting their very intentions. **(Summary of Proof)** . As confidantes, the Nurse and Friar give their help when needed because they care for the young couple, but their actions also lead Romeo and Juliet to make poor decisions. **(Final Insight)** Had the Nurse and Friar acted cautiously throughout the whole story instead, perhaps they could have prevented the tragedy from taking place instead of blindly trying to help.

Use of Quotes

When you put quotations in an analytical essay or research paper, you must introduce them with a “signal phrase.” A signal phrase essentially says to the reader, “quote coming up!” It is a *lead-in* to the quote, making the insertion of the quote smooth. When writing about a piece of literature, the signal phrase generally consists of:

- Who said the quote (if someone does)
- To whom the quote is said (if applicable)
- Who?, When?, Why? the quote is said. The answer to these questions sets the basic context for understanding the use of the quote in your paper.

Remember the following when using quotes:

--**Never let a quote stand alone as a sentence.** There are two ways of incorporating a quote into your writing:

1. **Use a signal phrase.** Example: After the Nurse’s first meeting with Romeo the Nurse tells Juliet, “I am the drudge and I toil in your delight” (II, v, 75).

Sometimes the quote you want to use is part of the narrative, not part of the dialogue. It is not said by anyone or to anyone. You must still *signal* that you are about to quote by explaining the quote’s basic context in the story. The quote still needs to be smoothly introduced into your analysis.

2. **Integrate the quote into your own writing.** Example: The Nurse considers herself a “drudge” and claims she “toil[s] in [Juliet’s] delight” (II, v, 75). When you integrate a quote, you often need to substitute your own words in the quote for it to make sense. The words in brackets [] are those that are substituted.

Example: The author of “Top Man” personifies K3 as a dangerous and intimidating mountain, indicating from the beginning of the story that it is an “antagonist. . . a white-hooded giant, secret and remote, but living. Living and on guard” (97).

--**Never copy a quote with a pronoun in it without providing background circumstances so the reader can know who the *she*, *he*, or *they* are.**

Example: --- After the Nurse’s first meeting with Romeo, the Nurse says, “I am the drudge and I toil in your delight.” *Here the reader is unsure to whom the “your” refers. To fix this, the writer can put* “After the Nurse’s first meeting with Romeo, the Nurse says to Juliet, “I am the drudge and I toil in your delight.”

Again, if you need to add words to a quote for it to make sense, you add those words in [brackets].

--ALWAYS use MLA citation format when quoting. In other words, remember to include the page number in parenthesis at the end of your sentence. Your final punctuation should always go *after* the parenthesis. Even if you're ending with a quote that contains an exclamation point or a question mark (put these *inside* the quotation mark), you will still include a period at the end of your sentence (behind the citation).

Example: --- When the general laughs at Rainsford's scruples about hunting humans, Zaroff comments that Rainsford has "such a naïve, and . . . mid-Victorian point of view" (26).

Note: Some works will require your citation to be something other than a page number. For instance, when quoting a Shakespeare play, proper citation is to note the Act, Scene, and Line number. For example (V, iii, 37). Note that here the act is shown as an upper case roman numeral, the scene as lower case Roman numerals, and the line as Arabic numerals. Some instructors might have you note this same Act 5, scene 3, line 37 in a different way. Other acceptable citations may be: (V, 3, 37), (5.3.37). Ask your instructor how he or she prefers you cite. When quoting Homer's *Odyssey*, you will be asked to note the Book and line number in your citation. Example: (9.12) for book 9, line 12. ***In all of these instances it is important to note that you do NOT write the words "page," or "act," "line," "book," etc.***

--Remember if you omit material from the quote, mark the omission by three periods (called an *ellipsis*) with a space between each (. . .). NEVER use an ellipsis at the beginning or end of your quotations, only in the middle if you leave out some words. If you are leaving out the end of a sentence, use FOUR dots (one additional one for the period).

-- You do not have to quote complete sentences.

-- You can break a quotation into two parts by inserting your own words around the quotations.

Example: The Friar is shocked to find Romeo dead, and when Juliet awakens, he hears a noise and says, "Come, go, good Juliet." He then cowardly admits, "I dare no longer stay" (V, iii, 159).

-- Sometimes you may want to quote both a narrative portion of a work and something someone says. To do this you must use both single and double quotation marks.

Example: After General Zaroff purposefully allows Rainsford to escape after having found him in the first day's hunting, Rainsford realizes for the first time "the full meaning of terror. 'I will not lose my nerve. I will not,'" he tries to convince himself (34).

Notice that Rainsford's words (thoughts that are treated as dialogue in the story) are enclosed in single quotes while the entire passage being quoted is enclosed in double quotes. Never put double quotes inside of double quotes or double quotes inside of single quotes.

Transitions

Individual sentences may be correct, clear, effective, and appropriate, and yet be neither clear nor effective when they are put together in a paragraph. If the order of the sentences within the paragraph is fully logical, then any lack of clearness probably is due to faulty transition. Remember that *transition* means passing from one place, state, or position to another, and that *evidence of transition* consists of linking or bridging devices. As applied to writing, there are three degrees of transition:

- between paragraphs
- within the sentence
- between sentences

Transitions indicate interrelations between ideas.

Some Advice:

- **Make the relationship between your paragraphs clear by using transitional words and phrases.**

Shifts in thought are always puzzling to a reader unless he is prepared in advance for them. By definition, a paragraph is a series of sentences dealing with one aspect of a larger topic. When the discussion of this aspect is finished, the writer should inform his reader of that fact and prepare him for the next phase of the discussion.

Transitions should be relatively brief and inconspicuous. They should not protrude so awkwardly that they distract the reader's attention from ideas. Since transitions reveals relationships, they should grow out of the nature of the material, and need only be put into adequate words to show the nature of already existing relationships.

Usually a transition is employed at the beginning of a paragraph. The connectives serve to link what is to follow with the thought that has gone before in the preceding paragraph.

Some of the more frequently used transitional words and phrases include:

To Show Addition: (in the same, or similar, or parallel direction):

and	also	moreover	furthermore	likewise
besides	similarly	again	another reason	
in addition	moreover	next	first	second

To Give Examples: as an illustration for instance for example
in fact specifically by way of comparison

To Compare: also in the same manner similarly
Likewise

To Contrast:	but in contrast even though	however nevertheless although	on the other hand still on the contrary	yet
To Show Time:	after during meanwhile	as later when	before finally immediately	next then while
To Show Place or Direction:	above farther on	below opposite	beyond close	nearby to the left
To Indicate Logical Relationship:	if thus	so as a result	therefore for this reason	consequently since

Commentary

Body paragraphs of your essay must contain quotes or other concrete details as examples to support your ideas. After each concrete detail, you need to discuss it; that is, you need to have *commentary with RTT (relate to thesis)*.

What is commentary? Commentary is

- **An insight or original thought that pertains to the quote/concrete detail you have given**
- **A discussion or interpretation of the meaning of the quote/concrete detail**
- **A conclusion drawn from the quote/concrete detail you have given**
- **An extending of the idea of the quote/concrete detail**
- **A speculation about the idea of the quote/concrete detail**
- **A discussion of the significance or importance of the idea in the quote/concrete detail**

What commentary IS NOT: Commentary **is not**

- An example from the book
- A fact
- “trampolining” off the text (Example: “If I were he, I wouldn’t do that.”)
- generic (a statement which could be plugged in anywhere and offers no insight) (Example: “I surely would have been scared.” Or “I wouldn’t have done that.”)
- cliché (Example: “Better late than never.”)
- trite/flippant (Example: “That was lame.”)

Some advice when writing commentary:

- You should relate your commentary to the concrete detail you are using and you should relate it to your thesis/topic sentence through the use of a *key* word.
- Try not to drift away from what you are trying to prove. Rather, try to extend your ideas, deepen them.
- Don’t just repeat the same thing the quote says! Don’t just paraphrase your quote!

Some Basic Rules for Analytical Essays

1. Always write an essay analyzing literature in the *present tense*. This is called the *literary present*.

Wrong: After the Nurse met Romeo, she told Juliet, “I am the drudge and I toil in your delight” (II, v, 75).

Correct: After the Nurse first meets Romeo, she tells Juliet, “I am the drudge and I toil in your delight” (II, v, 75).

2. Do not use “I,” “I think,” “It is my opinion,” “I believe,” “you,” “in conclusion,” “this quote shows,” or any similar expressions in your essays.
3. Do not use contractions (isn’t, doesn’t, don’t, etc.) in your essays. Instead, write out both words (i.e. is not, does not, do not, etc.).
4. Do not misuse “there,” “their,” and “they’re.” “There” indicates a place (i.e. There are many beautiful cities to visit in Europe.); “Their” indicates possession (i.e. Their house is very beautiful.); “they’re” is a contraction meaning “they are” (i.e. They’re coming home late this evening.)
5. Similarly, do not misuse “its” and “it’s.” “Its” is possessive (i.e. The dog was taken to the groom and looked very cool with its short cut.); “it’s” means “it is” (i.e. It’s a long time until June.).
6. Avoid wordiness. A sentence is wordy if its meaning can be conveyed in fewer words. Long sentences are not necessarily wordy, nor are short sentences always concise.
7. Stay away from jargon (i.e. specialized language used among members of a trade, profession, or group). Avoid pretentious language—don’t try to sound profound or poetic; sound like *you*. Pretentious language often obscures the thought that you are trying to convey.
8. Avoid slang, regional expressions, clichés, and non-standard English.
9. Use *active* rather than *passive* verbs. Active verbs convey action! They are more emphatic and vigorous than forms of the verb *be* or verbs in the passive voice. In the active voice the subject of the sentence does the action. In the passive voice, the subject receives the action.
10. Generally, do not have a paragraph longer than a page or shorter than four sentences (100-200 words are ideal). Longer paragraphs strain the reader’s attention span.