

Response to Literature Essays

Response to Literature essays focus on the analysis of a literary work or a piece or aspect of literature. A literary work can be an article, another essay, poem, short story, novel, etc. Your thesis statement should be your opinion about one or more aspects of the text, or the text as a whole. In a Response to Literature essay, you are required to use evidence from the text to support and/or prove your own ideas. It is absolutely essential that you know how to choose quotes from the text, as well as how to use them in your paper.

Key Prompt Words: text, poem, story, analyze, respond to, explore

Purpose

- To show your reader an understanding of a text and the connection between the text and the given topic of the essay, or the connection between one text and another and the given topic of the essay.

Important Aspects

- Include Applicable Quotations (Evidence)
 - Provide relevant quotations to support your position
 - Use quotations correctly
- Cite Your Quote
 - If applicable and available, include author, page, line, etc.

There are many ways to set up a **Response to Literature** essay; this is one example:

- I. Introduction
- II. Idea #1
 - a. Evidence from text
- III. Idea #2
 - a. Evidence from text
- IV. Idea #3
 - a. Evidence from text
- V. Conclusion

Literary Terms to Know

In order to express your opinion about a topic for a Response to Literature essay, it is crucial that you are familiar with some common Literary Terms. Below is a list of some terms you should be familiar with when writing about a text for a Response to Literature essay.

- ❖ **Plot** - the related series of events that make up a story
 - **Exposition** - the beginning of a story in which the main characters, conflicts, and setting are introduced
 - **Rising action** - the action that takes place before the climax; the plot becomes more complicated, leading to the climax
 - **Climax** - the turning point of the story; emotional high point for the protagonist
 - **Falling action** - the action that takes place after the climax, leading to the resolution
 - **Resolution** - the end of a story; problems are solved, and characters' futures may be foreshadowed
- ❖ **Conflict** - the struggle(s) between opposing forces, usually characters
 - **Internal conflict** - a character's struggle with himself or his conscience
 - **External conflict** - a character's struggle with an outside force, such as another character, nature, or his environment
- ❖ **Characters** - the individuals involved (either directly or indirectly) in the action of the story
 - **Protagonist** - the central character in a story; struggles against the antagonist
 - **Antagonist** - the conflicting force against the protagonist; can be another character, a force of nature, or the protagonist struggling against himself
 - **Foil** - a character who is nearly opposite of another character; the purpose of a foil (or character foil) is to highlight particular characteristics of each
- ❖ **Setting** - the time and place, or where and when, the action occurs
 - **Physical** - the physical environment in which a story takes place; this includes the social and political environment
 - **Chronological** - the time in which a story takes place (includes the era, season, date, time of day, etc.)
- ❖ **Point of View** - the perspective from which a story is told
 - **Narrator** - the "voice" that tells a story; may or may not reflect the opinions and attitudes of the author himself
 - **First person** - a narrator who uses the first-person pronouns (I, me, my, myself, etc.) when telling the story; focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of a particular character
 - **Third person limited** - a narrator who uses the third-person perspective with the third person pronouns (he, she, it, they, etc.); observes the action as an outside observer, revealing the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of *only one* character
 - **Third person omniscient** - like third-person limited, the third-person omniscient narrator uses the third-person perspective with the third person pronouns (he, she, it, they, etc.); this type of narrator observes the action as an outside observer, however, revealing the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of *several* characters
- ❖ **Theme** - the main idea behind a literary work; the message in the story

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- ❖ **Symbolism** - the creative use of objects, or **symbols**, to indicate a deeper meaning or to represent something important.
- ❖ **Diction** - an author's choice of words and word arrangement
- ❖ **Irony** - the difference between what actually happens and what might be expected to happen, especially when this inconsistency seems laughable or absurd
 - **Verbal irony** - when a speaker or writer says one thing but actually means the opposite. For example, when your mom walks into your filthy bedroom and says, "I see you've cleaned your room!"
 - **Situational irony** - when the outcome of a situation is inconsistent with what we expect would logically or normally occur.
 - **Dramatic irony** - when the audience or the reader is aware of something that a character does not know. The use of dramatic irony helps increase the tension and excitement of the play, and draws the audience more deeply into the story.
- ❖ **Figurative Language** - ideas communicated beyond their literal meaning to create an image in the reader's mind
 - **metaphor** - a comparison made between two seemingly unlike objects: "the pillow was a cloud"
 - **simile** - a comparison between two unlike objects using the words "like" or "as" in the comparison: "the pillow was *like* a marshmallow"
 - **personification** - giving human qualities or characteristics to non-human objects: "the wind sang its sad song"
 - **understatement** - deliberately de-emphasizing something in order to downplay its importance, ex. "The Internet has contributed somewhat to improving communication," is an understatement.
 - **hyperbole** - exaggeration for emphasis or for rhetorical effect, ex. "I died laughing."
- ❖ **Tone** - the author's attitude toward the subject or audience of a literary work; tone reflects the feelings of the writer, and can affect the emotional response of the reader to the piece.
- ❖ **Mood** - a general feeling that is created by the tone, *usually* described in expressions of feeling and emotions, such as fear, surprise, anger, hatred, contentment, or jealousy, to name a few.
- ❖ **Foreshadowing** - subtle details or clues which hint at upcoming events in a novel
- ❖ **Flashback** - when a writer presents events from the past within the narration of current events. In other words, the author takes a moment to "flash" to the past.

Incorporating Quotations into a Response to Literature Essay

When writing a Response to Literature essay, it is absolutely essential to include quotations. No matter how brilliant your paper is, Response to Literature essays are **incomplete** without quotations as evidence.

Quotations—whether direct or indirect—serve as evidence to the claims you are making in your paper, and illustrate and support your main points. Any time you use someone else's words or ideas, you must give credit to that person, whether you quote directly or just paraphrase. If you do not give credit to your sources it is considered **plagiarism**, which can very often earn you a failing grade on your paper.

In order to integrate quotations or support, you should follow a format of making a statement, then following with a supporting quote, then explaining how the quotation supported your statement, and finally, transitioning into your next statement in order to repeat the process again. (Notice that the transition sentence brings up another point (copying and pasting from questionable sources), which will be proven with evidence in the next few sentences, in the SEAT format again.)

Think of it with the acronym **SEAT**: 1) Statement, 2) Evidence, 3) Analysis, 4) Transition

Teachers and professors find that many students do not know how to incorporate quotations in their writing. Terrence Watson, professor at the University of Colorado, Denver asserts: "Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays" (43). This often misunderstood step is crucial in the writing process, as students must learn how to incorporate quotes in order to avoid plagiarism and make their essays legitimate. In fact, the evidence shows that not only do students not know how to cite evidence, but they also often copy and paste information from questionable sources on the Internet.

In this example, the page number was given in quotation marks after the quote. If the source cited came from a play, you would indicate that with the act, scene, and line number in parenthesis: (I. iv. 7-8) OR (1.4.7-8), written with either Roman or Arabic numerals, separated by periods.

When referencing a line or lines of a poem, line numbers should be given. If you are writing about more than one line of poetry, lines should be divided using a slash (/).

Sonnet 54 illustrates this eloquently: "The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem / For that sweet odour which doth in it live" (Shakespeare lines 3-4).

If you are not mentioning the source in the reference, it should be included in the parenthesis.

Shakespeare's description takes the reference even further: "The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem / For that sweet odour which doth in it live" ("Sonnet 54" 3-4).

Once you have mentioned the author's name once, do not include the poet's name in your parenthetical citation. Instead, include the first significant word(s) of the poem's title, followed by the line number(s). After that, use only the numbers in parenthesis. Of course, the poem(s) must be cited in the Works Cited page.

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No matter what type of citation, you must **ALWAYS** follow **SEAT**: make a **STATEMENT**, give **EVIDENCE** to support it, **ANALYZE** the support, giving your take on the quote or commenting on how the support backs up your statement, and **TRANSITION** into the next idea.

The following are different examples of citations used in a Response to Literature paper:

“Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays.”

1. **Paraphrase (Indirect quotation)**—using different words to express the same idea; do not use quotation marks at all
 - *Teachers and professors alike find that many students often misuse quotations in their papers.*
2. **Direct phrase or word quote**—using only one or a few words; use quotation marks around those words only
 - *Many teachers find that their students “omit or improperly use” quotes when writing papers.*
3. **MLA author/page citation**—author and page in parentheses; notice the period comes after the parenthesis
 - *“Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (Watson 43).*
4. **Full sentence quote with he/she said before the quotation**; place comma before the quotation mark, period
 - *Watson claims, “Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (43).*
5. **Full sentence quote with he/she said after the quotation**; comma replaces period at the end of the quote
 - *“Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays,” he argues (l.vii.117).*
6. **Full sentence quote with he/she said dividing the quote**; commas separate the quote.
 - *“Many writers,” he admitted, “omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (lines 5-7).*
7. **Full sentence quote with he/she said that at the beginning of the quote**; the word *that* takes the place of the comma
 - *He affirmed that “Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (Watson 43).*
8. **Full sentence quote with full sentence introduction to quote**; use a colon before the quote
 - *Scholars have proven with scientific evidence: “Many writers omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (Wilson, line 114).*
9. **Omitting words within a quote**; use the ellipsis between (...)
 - *“Many writers...use quotations in their essays” (15).*
10. **Adding or changing words within a quote**; use brackets to set off the change
 - *“Many writers [often] omit or improperly use quotations in their essays” (Watson 43).*

MORE rules for incorporating quotations in a paper:

1. Plays, novels, long poems, website titles, magazine titles, movie titles, and books should be italicized or underlined. (When typed, they should only be *italicized*.)
 - a. Shakespeare's *Macbeth*
 - b. *The Canterbury Tales*
 - c. *Shakespeare in Love*
2. Articles, chapter titles, song titles, poems, short stories, and essays should be punctuated with quotation marks.
 - a. Alanis Morissette's "Ironic"
 - b. Yeziarska's "America and I"
 - c. Langston Hughes's "I, Too"
3. As a rule, anyone you do not personally know should be referred to by their LAST name—not their first.
 - a. William Shakespeare should be referred to as *Shakespeare*, not *William*
 - b. Joseph Stalin should be referred to as *Stalin*, not *Joseph*
4. Always lead into a quotation with your own ideas or sentences; similarly, always follow a quotation with your own ideas. Follow SEAT.
5. Periods and commas *always* go inside quotation marks.
6. Question marks, exclamation marks, semi-colons, and colons go inside quotation marks when they are part of what is being quoted. When question marks and exclamation marks are used in a quotation, do not use a comma.
 - a. "You said *what*?" screamed the embarrassed teenager.
 - b. Why do they call her "Smarty Pants"?

Response to Literature Organizer with Quotes Prompt

Introduction	Grabber	Grab the reader's attention with a provocative question, strong statement, statistic, interesting fact, etc.
	Focus	1-2 sentences mentioning the title and author of the work(s), plus any applicable information necessary to introduce the essay.
	Thesis	1-2 sentences briefly introducing your 3 main points of description on the topic and how this topic applies specifically to the literature.
Point #1	Thesis Support #1	Begin with Thesis Support (which eventually become Topic Sentences); introduce one point to support your thesis
	Statement	Give an example or detail that supports the point presented in Thesis Support #1 (S)
	Evidence	Quotation that directly supports the detail or example above. (E)
	Analysis	Your response to/thoughts about the evidence. Comment on how this evidence supports your statement. (A)
	Transition	Conclude the analysis and enter the next idea. (T)
	Statement	Give an example or detail that supports the point presented in Thesis Support #1 (S)
	Evidence	Quotation that directly supports the detail or example above. (E)
	Analysis	Your response to/thoughts about the evidence. Comment on how this evidence supports your statement. (A)
	Transition	Conclude the analysis and enter the next idea. (T)
Point #2	Thesis Support #2	Begin with Thesis Support (which eventually become Topic Sentences); introduce one point to support your thesis
	Statement	Give an example or detail that supports the point presented in Thesis Support #2 (S)
	Evidence	Quotation that directly supports the detail or example above. (E)
	Analysis	Your response to/thoughts about the evidence. Comment on how this evidence supports your statement. (A)
	Transition	Conclude the analysis and enter the next idea. (T)
	Statement	Give an example or detail that supports the point presented in Thesis Support #2 (S)
	Evidence	Quotation that directly supports the detail or example above. (E)
	Analysis	Your response to/thoughts about the evidence. Comment on how this evidence supports your statement. (A)
	Transition	Conclude the analysis and enter the next idea. (T)

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Point #3	Thesis Support #3	Begin with Thesis Support (which eventually become Topic Sentences); introduce one point to support your thesis
	Statement	Give an example or detail that supports the point presented in Thesis Support #3 (S)
	Evidence	Quotation that directly supports the detail or example above. (E)
	Analysis	Your response to/thoughts about the evidence. Comment on how this evidence supports your statement. (A)
	Transition	Conclude the analysis and enter the next idea. (T)
	Statement	Give an example or detail that supports the point presented in Thesis Support #3 (S)
	Evidence	Quotation that directly supports the detail or example above. (E)
	Analysis	Your response to/thoughts about the evidence. Comment on how this evidence supports your statement. (A)
	Transition	Conclude the analysis and begin to wrap up. (T)
Conclusion	Modified Focus	Recap the focus of the essay and the essay prompt, restating the topic presented in the prompt.
	Modified Thesis	Reiterate/restate the points that support your thesis.
	Challenge	Leave the reader thinking about your essay; challenge the reader to take action or give the reader something important to ponder.

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Response to Literature Organizer with Quotes

Introduction	Grabber	
	Focus	
	Thesis	
Point #1	Thesis Support #1	
	Statement	
	Evidence	
	Analysis	
	Transition	
	Statement	
	Evidence	
	Analysis	
	Transition	
Point #2	Thesis Support #2	
	Statement	
	Evidence	
	Analysis	
	Transition	

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	Statement	
	Evidence	
	Analysis	
	Transition	
Point #3	Thesis Support #3	
	Statement	
	Evidence	
	Analysis	
	Transition	
	Statement	
	Evidence	
	Analysis	
Conclusion	Modified Focus	
	Modified Thesis	
	Challenge	

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Response to Literature Peer Editing Rubric

Writer's Name _____

Title of Essay _____

Directions: First, write your initials below in a space labeled #1 or #2 as appropriate. Then, read the essay, circling any spelling or punctuation errors, or anything that does not make sense or is not clear, then complete the chart below. Write YES if the element is evident and well-written. Write NO if it is missing or not done well or correctly.

Make your own decisions! Do not just blindly copy the answers another editor has given—decide for yourself! At the bottom of the chart, add up the total number of points for a score out of a possible 25 points. Once you have completed your evaluation, give the essay and this paper to another editor to complete the process again. At the end of this process, at least 2 editors should have evaluated and scored the essay. When the final editor is finished, he/she should return this sheet with the essay to the writer.

Important Points to Include in Essay	Points Possible	#1:	#2:
Has a minimum of 5 paragraphs	1		
Has an Introduction	1		
Has a minimum of 3 Body Paragraphs	1		
Has a Conclusion	1		
Has a catchy Title	1		
Has an effective Grabber	1		
Clearly states the topic presented in the essay prompt	1		
Clearly shows an opinion or position on the topic	2		
A topic sentence starts each body paragraph	2		
Clear details or examples have been used at least two times to support the first topic sentence	2		
Quotations clearly support these examples or details	1		
Clear explanations or examples have been used at least two times to support the second topic sentence	2		
Quotations clearly support these examples or details	1		
Clear explanations or examples have been used at least two times to support the third topic sentence	2		
Quotations clearly support these examples or details	1		
Conclusion includes a Modified Focus Statement	1		
Conclusion includes a Modified Thesis Statement	1		
Last sentence is a powerful Challenge	1		
Fewer than 3 spelling errors (have been circled)	1		
Fewer than 3 punctuation errors (have been circled)	1		
Overall Score Assigned to Paper	(25 Points Possible)	/ 25	/25