

How to make sure your literature essay is Spot On!

How to write a literature essay

Using appropriate style in a literature essay

- A literature essay is a formal piece of writing, and is written in the 3rd person. Do not use 'I'.
- Do not use colloquialisms, slang or abbreviations in your essay.
- Refer to characters in the present tense, e.g. Othello is ...
- If you are typing your essay, use italics for the title of the work you are discussing. If your essay is hand-written, underline the title.
- Remember to enclose your quotations in quotation marks.
- The tone should not be emotive, so you should not use exclamation marks. You need to argue your points logically and convincingly, explaining your points clearly.
- Avoid long, rambling and confused sentences and a pretentious, or showy, style. A long word is not necessarily the best word to convey meaning.
- Vary your sentence structure, and use semi-colons and colons to help create a suitable discursive style in your essay. This is the style we use when we discuss an issue.
- Use rhetorical questions - or questions used for effect as a stimulus to further discussion in your essay. You are supposed to be answering, not asking, a question!
- Although your reader will be very familiar with the work you are discussing, you still need to lead the reader through your argument. Do this by:
 - taking a new paragraph for each separate point
 - using words such as however, nevertheless, thus, therefore when you move from one point to the next
 - referring frequently to the various aspects of the topic
 - using only the most pertinent quotations to substantiate your points
 - keeping your quotations short and accurate.
- Do not misquote! If you cannot remember the exact words from the text,

paraphrase in your own words, without using quotation marks.

Planning your essay

Good planning is the key to success in a literature essay.

If you are writing a prepared essay, spend time preparing a rough draft that you can refine (improve) and polish.

In an exam, you will seldom have the time to do this. That is why it is important for you to have read the text more than once, and to have thought about it deeply, so that you will have all the information you need to construct a sound, well-supported response to the topic.

However, you should still spend a few minutes planning your essay, so that you know how your argument will develop before you begin to write the essay.

Analysing the topic

- Read the topic carefully to clarify what needs to be discussed.
- Do not give your essay another title, as this may distract you from all the aspects that should be covered in your essay.

The introduction

- Write out a good, short introduction that states clearly how you feel about the topic. Do you agree totally, partially, or not at all?
- The introduction tells the reader how your essay will develop. It also clarifies in your own mind what you will need to focus on in your essay.

The body

- Jot down the main points that you will be arguing in your essay, and make a note of any useful quotations that would support those points. Make sure that each point is relevant to the topic. Exclude all irrelevant information. A literature essay is not an opportunity for you to say everything you know about the text!

- Express your own opinions, but remember that you need to substantiate these from the text. A clear reference is perfectly adequate, but it is also a good idea to include some pertinent, brief quotations.
- Number your points in the logical order in which you will use them in your essay. This means that you must organize your paragraphs according to the development of your argument, not according to the chronological order of the text.

The conclusion

- Write out your conclusion in full. This should summarise your main argument, and draw a conclusion to the problem or thesis (idea) put forward in the topic.
- Do not end your essay with a rhetorical question. You need a strong statement to bring your argument to a conclusion.

Preparing the final draft

- Write out your introduction.
- Use your numbered points to form the body of the essay. Make sure that each point is relevant to the topic, and that your argument develops logically. Check that you have discussed all aspects of the topic. Explain your points clearly so that the reader can follow the development of your argument.
- Write out your conclusion.
- Edit your work carefully, paying attention to errors of grammar, spelling and style.
- Check quotations for accuracy