

Literary Analysis Essay Outline Template

I. Introduction

Hook: Engaging opening (quote, question, observation, or relevant context)

Background: Brief context about the work - Author and title - Genre and publication context - Relevant historical/cultural background (if applicable)

Thesis Statement: Clear, arguable claim about the literary work - Should identify the specific element being analyzed (theme, character, symbolism, etc.)
- Preview main supporting points

Example: “Through Gatsby’s relentless pursuit of an idealized past, Fitzgerald reveals how the American Dream becomes corrupted by materialism and impossible nostalgia.”

II. Body Paragraph 1

Topic Sentence: First main point supporting your thesis

Evidence: - Direct quotation or specific textual reference - Cite page numbers or line numbers

Analysis: - Explain how evidence supports your point - Connect to broader argument - Discuss literary techniques (imagery, symbolism, diction, etc.)

Transition: Link to next paragraph

III. Body Paragraph 2

Topic Sentence: Second main point supporting your thesis

Evidence: - Direct quotation or specific textual reference - Vary evidence types (dialogue, description, narrative)

Analysis: - Interpret significance - Show patterns or development - Connect to thesis

Transition: Bridge to next idea

IV. Body Paragraph 3

Topic Sentence: Third main point or counterargument consideration

Evidence: - Strongest textual support - May address complexity or alternative interpretations

Analysis: - Deepest level of interpretation - Synthesize previous points - Demonstrate sophisticated understanding

Transition: Lead toward conclusion

V. Conclusion

Restate Thesis: Rephrase main argument (avoid exact repetition)

Synthesize: Summarize how evidence supports thesis

Broader Significance: - Connect to universal themes - Discuss relevance or implications - Consider author's larger purpose

Closing Thought: Memorable final statement (avoid clichés like "In conclusion...")

Quick Tips

Each body paragraph = one main idea Use present tense when discussing literature Integrate quotes smoothly into your sentences Balance evidence with analysis (more analysis than summary) Maintain formal academic tone Proofread for clarity and precision

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Plot summary instead of analysis Opinions without textual evidence Overly long quotes (keep under 4 lines when possible) Ignoring counterevidence Weak thesis statements (too vague or obvious)