The Essay

Getting Started (Gr. 9)

The Literary Essay

The purpose of a literary essay is to state and **prove an argument** about the text you read **in response to the assigned topic**.

TASKS:

1. First, grab your reader's attention with a lead.

2. Then, state your argument (your thesis/insight into the topic).

3. Next, identify the three subtopics that will defend the argument.

4. Finally, write body paragraphs elaborating on how each subtopic proves the thesis (one double PPC paragraph for each subtopic).

5. Conclude by summing up your argument.

The Starting Line…

Understand the question:

- **break it down** so you know exactly what is being asked
- **turn** the prompt **into a question**
- do any **research** needed to help you to understand the topic within the question

Example to Practice

Write an essay on the <u>theme</u> of <u>impulsivity</u> <u>in</u> <u>*Romeo and Juliet*</u>.

<u>Trying to understand the above prompt:</u>

- How is impulsivity present in *Romeo and Juliet?*
- How do the examples of impulsivity in the play teach me about the cause of impulsivity in humans or its effects on humanity?

Brainstorming...

I write as many examples of impulsivity as I can think of from the text:

Romeo's impulsive reaction to physical love or failed love for Rosaline = depression

Romeo's impulsive reaction to physical love for Juliet = rebellion against societal norms

Romeo's impulsive reaction to failed love for Juliet = suicide

Juliet's impulsive reaction to physical love for romeo = rebellion against her parents and society

Juliet's impulsive reaction to failed love for romeo = suicide

The nurse's impulsive reaction to the idea of physical love = rebellion against societal expectations

Benvolio's impulsive reaction to failed love = rebellion (crashing the Capulet party)

Capulet's impulsive reaction to failed love = aggressive - disowns his daughter

Romeo's impulsive reaction to his friend's death = murder

Romeo's impulsive reaction to his wife's death = suicide

Look for Patterns...

Let's look at our brainstormed points on the board. Are there any **patterns** that teach us something specific about impulsivity?

Group examples under subtopics to show patterns.

Grouping into Subtopics

Pattern that appeared: reaction to physical love = rebellion
Each character is a subtopic…

- Benvolio's **reaction to physical love = rebellion** (crashes Capulet party to compare Rosaline to other beauties)
- Romeo's **reaction to physical love = rebellion** (kisses Juliet)
- Juliet's **reaction to physical love = rebellion** (against parents - even though she knows they want her to marry Paris, she marries Romeo without permission or consultation)

Resulting insight: impulsive reactions to physical love lead to rebellion

Turn the insight into a thesis

Insight: physical love leads to rebellion

Include the text title and author

Thesis: In *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare demonstrates how people's impulsive reactions to physical love lead to rebellion within a society.

include the topic
from the prompt

A Good Thesis Statement Is...

1. **Supportable**: If you did the brainstorming and you determined three supportable subtopics then this expectations has been met.

Can I do this with all three Of the subtopics?

<u>Subtopic 1</u> = Benvolio's **reaction to physical love leads to rebellion** against society.
Point (CAUSE) = Benvolio feels he must distract Romeo from his depression over Rosaline, and he impulsively decides that the only way he can do this is by introducing him to other beauties in Verona. Benvolio's desire to satisfy Romeo's need for physical love leads to him impulsively deciding to attend the Capulet party
Point 2 (EFFECT) = This is an act of rebellion because a Montague attending a Capulet party goes against Verona's social norms.

A Good Thesis Statement IS...

2. Singular: it has one focus

<u>Split Focus (bad)</u> = In *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare demonstrates how impulsive reactions to physical love and failed love lead to rebellion.

<u>Singular Focus (good)</u> =In *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare demonstrates how people's impulsive reactions to physical love lead to rebellion within a society. (one cause + one effect = singular focus)

A Good Thesis Statement Is...

3. Specific:

Too General (bad) =

In *Romeo and Juliet,* William Shakespeare demonstrates how impulsivity can lead to tragedy. (I'm left asking why or how)

OR

Impulsivity is a theme in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet. (How?)*

Specific (good) =In *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare demonstrates how people's impulsive reactions to physical love lead to rebellion within a society.

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A Good Thesis Statement Is...

4. Significant (to the audience)

Not significant (bad) = In *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare demonstrates how the characters are impulsive so they rebel against Verona's rules.

Significant (good) =In *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare demonstrates how impulsive reactions to physical love lead to rebellion within a society.

AND...

Significant to the text:

There should be evidence to support your thesis found throughout the text. Your essay should not be arguing something that is only seen in three chapters or one act of a text.

It's Your Turn...

Essay Prompt:
Write a thesis to demonstrate how Shakespeare supports the idea of predetermined fate in *Romeo and Juliet.*