

You Have a Strong Thesis Paragraph—Now What?

Developing topics for supporting paragraphs can be the most challenging part of writing a literary analysis; here are some suggestions:

Literary Style

Can you determine your novel's literary style? Is it romantic, gothic, realist, modernist, postmodernist, surrealist, utopian, naturalist, satiric? A combination of styles?

What narrative devices does your author use (e.g., symbolism, foreshadowing, flashbacks, framing, magical realism, etc.)? Does your novel call attention to its devices, to its own narrative process or construction? Does it hide its devices? Are you aware of your author's presence in the text?

Setting

There are basically seven main methods of creating setting in a piece of writing

1. Through the time period in which the story is set
2. Through the region or country in which the story is set
3. Through the season or seasons the story takes place in
4. Through the weather the characters experience as the plot evolves
4. Through the buildings the characters visit, live in, see
5. Through the things the characters own and what condition those things are in
6. Through the things with which the characters decorate their houses or rooms.
7. Through the things that characters notice other characters owning or wearing.

Repetition reinforces significant elements of a text, and many literary devices gain their power through repetition. Repeating an image throughout a text is a way to create a symbol. Repeating a theme or an image is the way to create a motif. Repeating a metaphor is how an author achieves an allegory.

Contrast, on the other hand, is—in a sense—the opposite of repetition, but can be just as powerful a way to shape a story and give it meaning. Authors can use a contrast in setting (English manor house vs. French battlefield), character (Briony's active role vs. Lola's passive role), and/or theme (love vs. war) to illuminate significant elements in the relationships between characters and the overall meaning of a text.

Story Arc:

Although you want to avoid "narrating" the novel or tracing the plot line in detail, your essay still must capture the arc of the story. A good way to do this is to 1) use the first supporting paragraph to offer an interpretation of the novel's *first couple of pages* within the context of your argument—even if it seems to be a stretch 2) later in your essay, devote another supporting paragraph to an interpretation of *the climax* within the context of your argument and 3) use the last supporting paragraph to an interpretation of the story's *last couple of pages*.

Narrator:

Write a paragraph that addresses the author's choice of narrator and how that choice gives support to your argument. In particular, address how the point of view (first person, third person omniscient, third person limited) shapes your novel and contributes to your argument.

Change:

Every novel will illustrate the force of change in some form or another; in fact, one helpful argument model is the causal argument, which argues for the most powerful cause of the change that occurs throughout the course of a story. Use supporting paragraphs to argue for smaller and less obvious changes or developments in character or theme.

Conflict:

Every novel will contain a conflict. Use a supporting paragraph to interpret the basic local conflict in a global way. Aim for an interpretation that is not obvious but still works to support your argument.

Figurative Language:

No literary analysis would be complete without some analysis of the text's prominent literary devices. You can easily devote a supporting paragraph to a recurring imagery, symbols or metaphors, or significant examples of irony in your novel. Make sure that your interpretations of these literary devices serve to directly support your argument.

The Author's Writing Style:

After reading three novels by the same author, you should have a pretty good idea of your author's unique writing style. For example, is her writing spare, clean, and direct, or is it more developed, formal, and complex? Does his writing contain a fair amount of dialect or idioms? Does she rely on a lot of figurative language? Ideally, you will be able to describe your author's style with details and then offer a connection between the *way* the story is told and your overall argument.

Tip: Before you begin to write your essay, write down the topic of each of your paragraphs on note cards, and then shuffle them around until you come up with the best order for a successful argument.

Finally: Do not forget transitions between supporting paragraphs; without them, your essay will seem haphazard and disconnected.