

Each instructor develops her or his own assignments. Your instructor and the assignment sheet s/he has provided are the two best sources for guidance as you work toward a final draft. The handouts/tutorials for the types of essays feature general guidelines to help you write solid essays, but they should be treated only as supplements to your instructor and the assignment sheet.

Purpose

To interpret a story or poem, often using literary elements to explain why you understand the literature the way that you do.

The Elements of Literature

(For more elements of literature, see our handout: Literary Elements)

Plot – the events that take place in the work

Example: *Romeo and Juliet meet, fall in love, and marry. Juliet fakes her death. Romeo kills himself. Juliet kills herself.*

Conflict – the oppositional relationship between a work's components, often identified broadly as a character vs. _____ (nature, herself, another character, fate, society, etc.)

Example: *Romeo and Juliet are in love, but their families hate each other.*

Characters – the people who populate a work

Example: *Romeo, Juliet, the various Montagues and Capulets, the Friar*

Imagery – the specific “visuals” used by an author or poet to achieve certain effects

Example: *The balcony scene. Juliet's death.*

Symbolism – objects, characters, or images that represent other, more abstract ideas

Example: *A famous speech that Mercutio delivers in the play presents Queen Mab as a tiny, fanciful symbol of the minute, unreal nature of love and other “dreams.”*

Topic

Try to find a story or poem that you respond to personally, especially one that you understand confidently.

Thesis

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Audience

Take for granted that your audience has read the story or poem. Assume that your audience understands what happens in the work, but is interested to find out how you interpret it. You probably need to work for a deeper interpretation than the example thesis, which is pretty elementary.

Specifics

As you defend your claim, use specific examples from the text without overloading your paper. Remember, the most important feature of this essay is your analysis of the story.

Example: The play begins by establishing the conflict between the Montagues and Capulets, who "[f]rom ancient grudge break to new mutiny" (line 3). In Act 3, scene 1, the feud between the two families turn