

Written

Arguments

*An Interdisciplinary Resource Book  
for Burroughs Freshmen*

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***Written Arguments:  
An Interdisciplinary Resource Book for Burroughs Freshmen***

***PREFACE***

This resource book emerged from the work of an interdisciplinary faculty committee dedicated to discussing curricular and non-curricular aspects of the freshman year experience at Burroughs. The committee ultimately focused on the ways in which one task is central to several ninth-grade courses: the writing of persuasive, well-supported arguments. Across the core academic subjects in your freshman year and beyond, you will learn to write about your thinking and you will learn to think clearly through your writing.

You are also learning to think independently and your teachers value their own independent thinking as well. Consequently, you will hear different teachers, even within one discipline and at one instructional level, speak of written arguments in different ways. You, the student, must then shift gears and even vocabularies as you move from teacher to teacher, class to class, and year to year. Those shifts require you to think flexibly, and in most cases they will expand and deepen your understanding of all we aim to teach you about writing and thinking during your time at Burroughs. We do not, therefore, offer up this resource book as the last word on how to write great arguments. Instead, we present it to you so that you can begin to compare and contrast some of the different modes of written argument you will encounter in ninth grade. We hope that these comparisons will help you along as you work to master the art of argumentation.

**SECTION I: MATHEMATICAL PROOFS**

***A. What is the role of writing in 9th grade math?***

You learn to write in a math class for two main reasons. First, writing simply is part of mathematics: you have to learn how to use the proper symbols and language to convey your ideas. Second, writing helps you learn: the process of translating your thoughts into words makes you understand the ideas much better than you did before. The idea that math is about understanding and not about explaining is a myth—understanding and explaining go hand-in-hand.

**B. *What kinds of writing assignments will I have to do in a math class?***

Although learning to write good solutions in an algebra class is important, the real mathematical writing starts when you study geometry and you learn to write proofs. All Burroughs ninth-graders learn to write proofs either in September or in April. A mathematical proof is like a mini-essay that gives an argument for why a particular fact (called a theorem) is true. You learn how to structure the proof so that the logic is clear and correct, and you learn how to state theorems in clear, concise ways so that the proof is understandable.

**C. *How is writing a proof similar to writing an essay?***

The aim of both a proof and a persuasive essay is to convince the reader that your point is correct. Much as an essay opens with an introduction, a proof opens with a picture along with “given” and “prove” statements that together pose the basic question or thesis. A proof then goes on to make individual statements, one after the other, each supported by a reason based on facts that are accepted as true, and it continues until the point is made. This section is analogous to the body of an essay, where you argue the points for your thesis based on specifics such as historical facts, findings from a lab, quotations from a book, or research into what others have thought. Finally, just as an essay ends with a conclusion, and your proof tells the reader when it is finished.

Of course, your proofs are usually much shorter than a paper or essay, but that’s because the argument is stripped down to its logical basis. (Not all proofs are short: a recent, very famous proof was over 200 pages of extremely dense symbols, diagrams and logic!) Learning the logical structure of proofs will help you to see the basic skeleton of an argument in an essay: What kinds of statements need support? Is the evidence relevant to the argument? How are the various statements connected? In what order should the statements appear? Any good persuasive essay uses logic soundly and efficiently to make its point. A logical structure is the skeleton of an essay; the actual facts, quotations, ideas and interpretations are the flesh on the skeleton that makes each essay different. And on top of that, stylistic qualities such as creative

*Mathematical Proofs*

word choice and rhythmic, musical sentence structures will make your essay artful, original and enjoyable. But no matter how attractive your details or language are your essay won’t convince an astute reader unless you use sound logic. Learning to recognize and produce sound logic, both for proofs and for other sorts of written arguments, is one of the main objectives of the geometry courses at Burroughs.

**D. *What kinds of proofs are there?***

A proof will take one of two basic forms. At first, you will mostly write two-column proofs, which are designed for you to learn the basic structure of proofs. As you get further in geometry and other math classes, you will mostly write paragraph proofs, in which you will use a combination of pictures, symbols, algebra and writing to get your point across.

**E. *What makes a good two-column proof?***

All good two-column proofs must have the same basic components.

1. You must draw a picture. Many students don't see the importance of this at first, but the picture is one of the basic facts of most proofs, and omitting it makes the proof unreadable.
2. You must state the "given" and "prove" information next to the picture. If this is missing, the reader doesn't really know what you're up to.
3. You must present the body of the proof in two columns: statements and reasons.
  - a. Statements are the step-by-step claims you make about the specific picture. For example, you might claim that two segments are the same length or that an angle is a right angle.
  - b. Each statement has a corresponding reason that justifies why its statement is true. The reasons are always **general** statements about definitions or previously proven facts. The reasons are **general** in the sense that they never refer to the facts of the specific problem you are working on. Instead they state a general fact about geometry. For example, if the statement was that two segments are the same length, your reason might be that "if a point is a midpoint of a segment, it divides that segment into two congruent parts." Note that there is no mention of any specific point or segment, just midpoints and segments in general.
- c. You must conclude by basically stating "I'm finished!" Your teacher will tell you more specifically what he or she wants here.

*Mathematical Proofs*

In addition, the statements of a two column proof must be in the right order; each fact you use must be established as true in a previous step. Finally, all statements must be relevant; you might be able to discover all sorts of facts about a picture, but only those facts that directly affect your argument should be included in the

proof.

**F. *What makes a good paragraph proof?***

The point of a paragraph proof is to make your argument sound like natural speech, not just a back-and-forth recitation of statements and reasons. Writing a good paragraph proof takes a lot of practice. You can usually leave out steps that are “obvious,” but it is not always clear which steps are actually obvious. “Obviousness” depends as much on the audience for your writing as it does on the specifics of the math. Sometimes it makes sense to give the statement, but leave out the reason (because it’s obvious), and sometimes it doesn’t. Your teacher will give you examples of good paragraph proofs, and you will improve on them as your understanding of logic and geometry improves.

**SECTION II: SCIENCE WRITING**

**A. *What is the purpose of writing in the science curriculum?***

The primary purpose of all writing in science is to effectively and clearly communicate information to others. A parallel goal achieved by the process of writing a lab report is to help you organize and reflect on the information gathered during an investigation and to draw logical conclusions from it. In this process you thoughtfully reflect on the process and the data and you clearly communicate that information to others.

**B. *What are the parts of a formal lab report?***

1. Title page
2. Introduction and Hypothesis
3. Procedure
4. Data Presentation and Analysis
5. Conclusion

**C. *What belongs on the title page?***

The title page is a cover page that includes the title of the lab, your name, your teacher and the date the paper was submitted. Graphics may be included if they relate to the topic.

**D. *How do you create an introduction and hypothesis?***

Just as writing a geometric proof involves a certain order and process, so a similar order and process define the writing of a science lab report. A good introduction lays the foundation for both the hypothesis and the conclusion. Since the hypothesis describes what you are testing, this statement must be built upon sound information. As a proof begins with a picture and the “givens,” in a similar way the introduction to a lab report presents the set of “givens,” the background research that allows one to formulate a hypothesis. Thus the introduction gives information upon which the hypothesis is based. Assume your reader is a student of biology who nevertheless knows very little about the subject of this particular experiment. Your introduction should therefore include only information that is pertinent to the experiment. For example, if you are conducting an experiment on the growth of bacteria, then include only the information that is important for the reader to know about that type of bacteria. Describe this bacteria and its conditions for life, for instance, but do not present an entire lesson on microbiology. Your reader should flow from the final portion of your introduction into the hypothesis with an understanding of the subject under investigation in this experiment.

A hypothesis is an estimate or "educated guess" about the solution of a problem based on facts, observations and previously available information. The hypothesis statement must be in the “If . . . then . . .” format. “If” is the cause and “then” is the effect. For example, when a student is looking at the effect that heat has on water, the background information consists of

*Science Writing*

properties of heat and water and the hypothesis might be “If constant heat is applied to the bottom of a pan of water, then the temperature of the water will increase until it reaches the boiling point of water.” This statement gives the student a guideline for the set of data to collect in this experiment: the changing temperature of the water.

**E. *Why is the procedure included in a lab report?***

You write out the procedure of a lab report to help yourself and your reader reflect your process, the general experimental approach you used to study the problem. The procedure section usually takes the form of numbered steps and gives the reader concise directions that could be replicated if the reader wanted to repeat the experiment. You can assume that the reader has general knowledge of lab process but your directions should still describe all important steps and techniques. Procedures are always written in past tense.

***F. How is data organized?***

The data section of a lab report presents in an orderly format all information gathered in the process of the investigation. Data is generally presented in the form of graphs, tables and sketches. The data presentation section is not a place for paragraphs or essays. It is the accumulation of information that is going to be used to support or refute your hypothesis. Well labeled and titled data tables and graphs should be constructed neatly using rulers and graph paper in order to insure accurate analysis of the information. Units of measurement are required to give the values meaning and accuracy. Sketches should be made to scale with clarity and detail and they should be labeled accurately and neatly.

The data analysis section includes any mathematical computations that are necessary to interpret the data. For example, rate calculations generated from slopes of line graphs, statistical calculations of the Chi-squares and generation times from a population growth curve would appear in the analysis section of your report. Here too all values must include units and labels.

***G. How does a conclusion thoughtfully reflect on all of this information? How is this considered a scientific argument?***

Once you have finished the analysis, you can then turn these numerical values and qualitative observations into written thought. Your conclusion restates your hypothesis and goes on to use the data and data analysis either to support and accept or refute and reject the hypothesis; in other words, you should use your data values and any calculated values to build your argument. The hypothesis with which you began doesn't have to be correct. Remember that it was an educated guess that guided your planning of the experiment. It is perfectly legitimate to have guessed incorrectly and then it becomes your job to show, with data, where your hypothesis was incorrect and why it should be rejected. Discuss your treatment of any

*Science Writing*

data that appears "suspect to error" without making excuses for surprising results. You should propose possible explanations for the data collected and whether or not this data supports your hypothesis. Be as clear and concise as possible. Don't forget that you must truly base your conclusion on your data. This means that all statements must be supported with data values that show what you are claiming to be true.

***H. Is there a proper form to use when writing this document?***

Proper form will include the following qualities: writing in the third person and in the past tense, focusing on what occurred in the experiment rather than on the experimenter (for example, write "Flies were etherized"<sup>1</sup> rather than "Etherize the flies" or "I etherized the flies"); using section headings and proper section order; being neat and organized in your presentation; using a word processor and spell checker; providing page numbers; and citing sources of information used or included in the report according to department guidelines available on line at the science department web page (<http://www.jburroughs.org/science/science.html>).

### **SECTION III: HISTORY ESSAYS**

#### ***A. What kinds of writing assignments will be required in a World Civilization I class?***

Students will write short essays on exams and homework assignments. Additionally, they might be assigned expository essays to be written outside of class on supplemental readings or a specific topic. Students will also write a research paper in the third trimester. Through learning to construct well written historic essays, students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of course content and they will also develop organizational skills that will prove

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this model is in the passive voice, a verb form many of your English teachers will urge you to avoid when you can. Reflect on why the disciplines differ on this point.

crucial to the planning and writing of the required research paper in the spring.

**B. *What steps are important in writing a history essay on an exam?***

1. **Interpret the question.** The student should read the question several times to determine exactly what information is expected. When students know what the question asks, they can essential elements to address in the response.
  
2. **Collect and sort ideas facts in an informal outline.** These preliminary efforts will provide a specific plan and excellent framework for the essay. Essay exam questions often include such words as “compare,” “contrast,” “define,” “describe,” “discuss,” “explain,” and “illustrate.” Students should consider the meaning of these key words in organizing their response and keeping it consistent with the topic of the question.
  
3. **Compose the essay.** The student should begin the introduction by developing a thesis statement. The thesis for an exam essay may merely be the essay question rewritten as a declarative sentence. The thesis statement clearly relates the student’s position on the question and leads into the supportive evidence.

Students need to apply the basic components of good paragraph development with topic sentences, factual statements, analysis, and transitional sentences. Each paragraph should begin with a clear topic sentence which gives the paragraph a sense of direction. The topic sentence expresses the main idea and defines the parameters of the paragraph. The topic should not be too general or too narrow in scope. The student should always develop the topic fully and support it with historic facts and ideas as well as analysis. The most relevant facets of the topic should be explored in a logical, chronological sequence. The other sentences in the paragraph should support the topic sentence. Supporting information should consist of examples (specific instances that illustrate a more general statement), details (pieces of information that help to describe), facts (proven statements that offer useful information), incidents (events that explain), or reasons (arguments that help to persuade). By utilizing strong supportive information, students will avoid vague statements,

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generalizations, and unsupported opinions. **The concluding sentence of the paragraph should provide a transition to the next paragraph.**
  
4. **Review, revise, edit and proofread the essay** for proper sentence construction, punctuation, grammar, capitalization, and spelling. Good writing skills applied always enhance the position and content of a history essay.

**C. *What is a well written thesis statement and how is it developed?***

A thesis statement, which introduces and summarizes the entire argument, is the most efficient means by which students can communicate their subject, goals, purposes and opinion. It puts into a nutshell the central idea, which the rest of the essay explores and develops with details and examples. Beyond merely stating the main idea of the essay, the thesis also asserts a specific opinion about that topic. It sets forth in one or more sentences the controlling idea and serves as a road map which structures the rest of the essay. A thesis statement answers the following questions:

**What point will the writer make?**

**What opinion will the essay present?**

**What stand will the writer take?**

**What is the focus of the writer?**

**What is the nature of the factual support to be presented?**

A thesis statement should be restricted and specific enough to reveal clearly the subject and direction of the writing. A well written thesis statement helps to keep the writing unified, the student sticks to the specific subject and direction that the thesis indicates. Because the thesis provides a basis for decisions about what to include and what to exclude in the argument, it also helps the student to organize his or her ideas. Thesis statements are most commonly weakened by lack of unity and lack of focus. A thesis should state a single, controlling idea. The idea may be complex and have several parts, but it should, nevertheless, be one idea.

**D. *What additional writing features should be considered in writing an essay outside of class?***

1. Given additional time outside of class, students should develop the introduction of the essay by
  - a. engaging the reader's interest ( background information, a relevant quotation, etc.)
  - b.. stating the thesis for the entire paper (the writer's personal opinion on the given topic that is the single most important step in the entire process)
  - c. explaining the essay's organizational structure (points to be developed to prove or support the thesis).

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This introductory paragraph, which will begin with a broad, general comment on the topic meant to catch the reader's attention, will slowly narrow the focus on the topic to specific questions before narrowing the focus further toward the thesis.

2. The student should also give more extended attention to developing the conclusions in an essay written outside of class. The conclusion should be based

on the evidence that has been presented. Students should not restate the introduction or introduce new facts at this point. Some of the following techniques might be incorporated in the conclusion:

- a. Place the topic into historical or cultural context. What does it all mean? Why is this topic important?
- b. Evaluate the overall general significance of the topic in its own time and/or at present.
- c. Discuss how this topic influenced or shaped later decisions or events.
- d. Describe how this topic promotes a greater understanding of human behavior, the characteristics of institutions, or the nature of change.

The conclusion and last sentence should be adequately compelling to sustain the reader's attention and confirm the historic significance of this topic.

3. Students should also direct more attention to proofreading of both the content and mechanics when writing essays outside of class. Proper sentence and paragraph construction, correct grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling will generally play a greater role in the evaluation process for such an essay. **Additionally, students should comply with the length requirement and due date specified for each essay.**

**E. *What other general guidelines should students follow in writing history essays?***

1. Students should generally use active voice, not passive voice, verbs in their writing.
2. Students should generally use the past tense in their writing. Since they will be discussing historic events, ideas, and people, they should consistently reflect this in their verb tense.
3. Students should strive to use concise, clear vocabulary. Vague, wordy sentences do not convey a clear knowledge and understanding of the topic.

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4. Students should avoid using first person ("I") and second person ("you").
5. Students should review the proper use of such punctuation marks as commas, colons and semicolons.
6. Students should check sentence structure, noting that **subject and predicate agree**. Sentences should be varied, beginning in a variety of ways and

including compound and complex form

7. Students should avoid the use of contractions.
8. Students should define terms completely and follow them with acronyms or abbreviations in parentheses [e.g. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)]. Afterward, the acronym or abbreviation may be used alone.

#### **F. *What is a research paper?***

This appears to be a simple question; however, misunderstanding the goal of the research paper assignment is a common mistake. The research paper involves four important steps:

1. Devising an historical question (hypothesis) about the causes or effects of an issue
2. Searching (searching and searching again = research) documents, books, and periodicals to find clues (evidence) to determine an answer (thesis) to your question
3. Logically arranging the clues to construct your answer to the question
4. Convincing other people of the validity of your thesis through a written presentation of the evidence and your conclusion.

Consequently, the research paper proves the answer to the question instead of merely describing the event or the person's action. Many students try to include in the research paper EVERYTHING they learned while doing research. Unfortunately, this approach leads students to include trivial or even irrelevant information. The key to a successful paper is including only the specific, relevant evidence you found and explaining how that evidence ties together to prove your thesis.

*NOTE:* Avoid the use of the word "obvious." Nothing is obvious; you have to prove it.

#### **G. *Why is writing a research paper so important?***

At first, some students see the research paper as "a waste of time" or "useless" until they understand the purpose behind it. As a discipline, history uses historical research papers in

*History Essays*

much the same way that math uses proofs, science uses lab experiments, and English uses literary analysis: to teach you the skills involved in researching an issue and drawing an informed conclusion. These valuable skills promote good decision-making. The more practice you gain in using these critical thinking skills the less likely you are to jump to conclusions or accept someone else's conclusions, such as in advertising or political rhetoric, without adequate proof.

An opinion on an issue is similar to a thesis. When you are able to present an opinion in both

written and oral form, you make your opinion stronger. The research paper requires you to write out the thought process that led you to your conclusion. In other words, you need to explain how you connected the information together. That process, of analyzing and explaining your own thought about the information, is more important than what the information is!

#### **H. *What makes for a good paper?***

Logical organization that reflects the steps your brain took to make the thesis; specific evidence that proves each step of your thought process; convincing communication of A and B through clear, concise, precise, and accurate organization and grammar.

Your written argument convinces the reader to believe your thesis based on the evidence and logic you present in the paper! Therefore, sloppy paragraphing undermines the logic of your argument and sloppy writing devalues the quality of your evidence.

#### **I. *What do you mean by “logical organization”?***

The paper extends the skills explained in the first part of the History section. Just like in geometry and biology, you need to define each step that you make in order to prove your thesis. Basic paper organization includes the following sections:

1. Introduction: To develop interest, and to present your thesis along with the basic outline of your argument.
2. Background information: The “givens” of the event (who, what, where, when) - it already happened--the events are not a secret!
3. Proving “Why”: this section will be composed of multiple sections because there is never only one reason why an event occurred.

Section A - Prove reason A, using MULTIPLE paragraphs.

Section B - Prove reason B, using MULTIPLE paragraphs.

Section C - Prove reason C, using MULTIPLE paragraphs.

4. The Conclusion - the Q.E.D. - however, you may not just abruptly stop, you

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must link Sections 1,2, and 3 together and not try to introduce anything new.

#### **J. *What is “good writing”?***

As emphasized earlier, strong, tight paragraphs that lead the reader step by step through your argument form the backbone of the paper. Proper grammar, strong quotations presenting your evidentiary support, scholarly word choice (no slang!), and correct term paper mechanics,

especially for quotations, endnotes, and bibliography all make your paper convincing. Using the simple past tense and staying in third person simplifies sentence structure and promotes objectivity. Strive for professionalism!

Also, avoid writing as if you are directly addressing your instructor. Consider your parents or a peer as your audience; doing so will force you to clarify your explanations thoroughly.

Expository writing for history can easily become stiff and redundant. Vary your sentence structure, combine short sentences into complex longer ones, and utilize transitional markers to lead the reader through your argument. Appendix A in the English section explains how to successfully integrate quotations, while Appendix B provides you with a variety of transitional markers. Use these to polish your prose so you can be proud of the time and effort you invested in this month-long project. Good luck and do not be afraid to ask any questions!

#### **SECTION IV: LITERARY ANALYSIS**

##### ***A. What is the purpose of writing arguments in English class?***

In English, as in the other freshman courses represented in this booklet, you learn to write about conclusions you have drawn from evidence you have not just seen but scrutinized. In some of the writing assigned to you in English I, you will render your observations in dramatic or creative forms such as fiction, personal essay or poetry. Other writing assignments will require

you to argue a point more directly, distilling it into a clear thesis then proving that thesis explicitly by presenting and discussing evidence you have chosen and sequenced with care. In learning to write more clearly, you will learn to think through your arguments more clearly.

**B. *How is writing an argument in English like writing an argument in math, science or history?***

All of the forms of written argument considered in this resource book share a fundamental trait: all of them are based upon logical analysis and presentation of carefully studied specific data. Only some of the written arguments you will compose for English class will concern your analysis of literary works. Nevertheless, because literary analysis is a crucial skill that your English teachers will ask you to hone throughout all your years at Burroughs, and because the literary analysis essay, rooted as it is in a defined body of evidence, is in some ways analogous to other sorts of written arguments discussed in this booklet, the commentary that follows will focus only on the literary analysis essay.

**C. *How do you prepare to write a literary analysis essay?***

- 1. Search:** read your text carefully. Mark seemingly significant lines or passages in your text as you read
- 2. Devise a working thesis.** Read the prompt and focus in on the issue you think you'll be exploring in your essay. Your working thesis needn't be perfect; it need only narrow your field, at first, as you begin your research.
- 3. Research:** *rereading* the text, at least partially. You can't interpret a text well without knowing it well and most of us can't know a text well without encountering it more than once. If you annotate your text the first time you read it, then you can use your own markings to guide you through your rereading/researching phase. Return to your text to gather data from it in the form of quotations that seem somehow relevant to your working thesis. As is the case with a history research paper, in a literary analysis essay, you will probably gather more data from the text than you will use in the actual essay. In the

*Literary Analysis*

process of amassing more quotations than you will use, however, you'll begin to refine your argument, and you'll be able to make educated choices between really rich quotations that deserve discussion and superficial ones that don't warrant analysis.

**D. *How does an effective introduction work?***

**1. The package.** Your introduction packages your thesis and consists of whatever it takes to engage your reader's interest in the idea you will be exploring. Consider this sample situation: Susan is writing a paper on Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. In her thesis she will argue her interpretation of a theme in the play: that even though we tend to think of love as a joyful, healing force, Shakespeare exposes the irony that love can also confuse and destroy. What follows is a partial list of "hooks," ways one could launch an introduction and package a thesis (d. and e. below apply only to arguments about literary works). Susan could hook our attention and guide it toward the thesis with...

**a. a GENERAL STATEMENT ABOUT THE KEY ISSUE** (in her case, love).

*example:* The lengths to which some will go for love reveal its strange power.

or

**b. an ANECDOTE that illustrates** some element of what the thesis will claim.

*example:* I will never forget the bizarre changes that came over my big sister the first time she fell in love. That summer, whenever I saw her coming, I had to guess whether she wanted to hug me or slug me....

or

**c. a short, well chosen QUOTATION** relevant to the central issue of the thesis.

or

**d. a FOCUSED, VIGOROUS DESCRIPTION of some key element** of the work, such as its setting, a central character, or a tense moment of plot conflict.

or

**e. a general REFERENCE TO THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORKS.** Do this only if you are actually familiar with more than one of the author's works.

**2. The thesis.** A good thesis does not state a plainly evident fact; it states an opinion--not "mere opinion," but a substantiated opinion the thinker has *earned* by scrutinizing and drawing valid conclusions from relevant details, the very details you will examine with the reader in the body of the essay. To achieve your thesis, refine your working thesis by crystallizing your *argument* and distilling your *claim* about the issue at hand into one statement. Like the idea it articulates, the thesis statement is often complex. Sometimes the thesis statement is one sentence long, sometimes longer. In a literary analysis essay, the thesis often articulates a significant theme in the literary work--that is, a significant truth about human experience that the literary work in question seems to help to reveal.

The ends of verbal structures (phrases, sentences, paragraphs, papers) form stress positions; they automatically get extra attention from the reader because of the pause that

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follows any ending. You may often find it useful, therefore, to place your thesis *last* in the introduction paragraph, in the natural spotlight that falls on the paragraph's end.

Wherever you place the thesis, though, be sure that you can identify it. One good trick: underline your thesis, at least in your draft, so that you can easily check for consistency between essay and thesis as you draft and revise. Another vital strategy: try to refine your thesis after you finish your whole draft. Often a writer needs to draft an entire essay to discover how to

think about and phrase the thesis most clearly. This is one of the points at which lab reports in science differ from literary analysis essays: in science, if your experiment disproves your hypothesis, you simply write that up and the result is still valid, scientifically. On the other hand, if, in drafting a literary analysis essay, you find that the text fails to support your working thesis, then you need to change the thesis and redefine your argument around an idea the text really does support. That's one reason why we write drafts; they teach us, at times, about the arguments we *can't* sustain.

**E. *What are some of the key components of the body of a literary analysis essay?***

**1. Support.** Evidence is the backbone of any written argument. Without a backbone, you could not move, and without strong, sufficient evidence, your argument cannot progress. Just as the introduction packages the thesis, so each body paragraph packages some of the evidence that proves that thesis.

Remember to follow through, after you present each piece of evidence, with your critical description of just what that piece proves. (*\*See the detailed discussion of the handling of evidence in literary analysis essays in the Quoting and Citing Guide, Appendix I.*)

**2. Transitions.** In order to unify your argument, demonstrate the relationship of a body paragraph to the body paragraph before it by weaving an appropriate transitional word, phrase or idea into the beginning of the new paragraph (for some transitional markers, see Appendix II).

**F. *What is the job of the conclusion paragraph in a literary analysis essay?***

The present English I teachers often advise students to think of the conclusion as the place where the author not only confirms the thesis idea (by confidently assuming it or even amplifying it rather than merely restating it) but then goes further to answer the implicit question "So what?" Why was this idea worthy of the extended attention you gave it in this paper? What are the idea's possible implications? What does it leave us to think about? In what small or large way might it illuminate life beyond this essay? Strive to suggest your main idea's more general importance without slipping into an overgeneralization or a cliché.

**APPENDIX A. GUIDE TO QUOTING AND CITING SOURCES IN ENGLISH ESSAYS.**

*These guidelines are adapted from those published by the Modern Language Association (MLA). For the purpose of this appendix, Q=quotation.*

**1. CHOOSE AND TRIM YOUR QUOTATION well.**

**a. Choose quotations carefully.** Your Q must offer *clear* illustration of the point

you're trying to prove in that paragraph. *A Q that doesn't lend firm support to your point may do more harm than good to your essay.* If you choose a Q that doesn't warrant any analysis because it's self-evident or superficial, either subordinate that Q to another richer one it can supplement, or get rid of the weak Q altogether and find one that's worth examining and talking about.

**b. Trim out** beginnings, middles, or ends of Qs where necessary in order to focus the Q and in order to blend it into your lead-in grammatically. Show where you cut, though:

**i.** If you cut the beginning of a quoted sentence, the lower-case letter your Q then starts with is enough to show you made a cut at the start.

**ii.** If you trim from the middle or the end of the Q, mark the cut with an **ellipsis (. . .)**. Make sure whatever is left flows grammatically, even after the cut.

**iii.** You can make other changes in Qs as well, for the sake of flow or clarity (you could change a pronoun to a clearer noun, for example), as long as you show, by enclosing your substitution in **square brackets [ ]**, that you made an editorial change in the quoted text.

(e.g. "A kind of glamour was spread over [the boys]. . .")

## 2. Provide an efficient, grammatical LEAD-IN.

**a. Situate the Q.** Set up the Q with an efficient bit (sometimes as little as half a sentence) of plot *context*: what is going on when this Q gets said and (if applicable) who says it to whom?

**b. Blend your lead-in into the Q *grammatically*.** *Two basic ways to blend in your Q:*

**i. Follow your lead-in with a colon.**

e.g. They stand, watching the pig, thinking about what they have to do:

"There came a pause, a hiatus, the pig continued to scream and the creepers to jerk, and the blade continued to flash at the end of a bony arm" (31).

**ii. Combine the quoted words with your own lead-in into one sentence**

Show that you can smooth the author's ideas right into yours.

e.g. To Percival's dreadful report of the beast, Ralph replies impatiently, "Did you hear that? Says he saw the thing in the dark--" (36).

e.g. Piggy is frustrated with the boys for "acting like a crowd of kids" (38).

\*Test the smoothness of your blended sentence: cover up the quotation marks and read the sentence through, from your lead-in to the first full stop (period or semicolon) in the Q. If it all reads *as a grammatical sentence*, then you have probably done a good job.

**c. Vary your lead-ins** (variety keeps the reader's ear interested).

- i. Vary your **syntax** and thus your punctuation. Avoid plopping Qs in abruptly right after periods. Colons work because they wed your lead-in to the Q, but don't use colons every time, either. Like anything else, they grow boring with overuse.
  - ii. Vary your **signal words**. When you're splicing a Q into your own sentence, you will often need to use some version of the verb "says." But consider the abundance of alternatives to "says": *announces, declares, objects, replies, asks, insists, questions, remarks, complains, contends, asserts, claims, demurs, agrees, disagrees, implores, suggests, reports, describes, reveals, inquires, wails, laments, exclaims, etc., etc., etc.* Note that most of these signal words (the list goes on) are more precise than those good old generic standbys, "says" and "states."
3. **Follow the Q with relevant, focused ANALYSIS and DISCUSSION!** *You don't have a real argument without it this step.* You've chosen this Q carefully to prove a specific interpretive point. Now make sure you *follow through after the Q*. Discuss the Q analytically in order to establish the fact that it proves the point you want to make in that paragraph. *Special warning:* take care not to put the analytical cart before the evidentiary horse. Even though you have probably thought through some or all of your analysis by the time you set up your Q, *hold on a minute:* *save* the writing of that analysis until after you've actually quoted the evidence. If you show your reader the evidence first, the reader will better follow explanation of what that evidence *means* or *shows*.
4. **SHOW OFF YOUR MASTERY of the quoting process.**
- a. **Know when to EMBED or BLOCK a PROSE quotation:**
    - i. *Embed* the Q (place it inside quotation marks and incorporate it into the text) if it fits on four or fewer lines of your essay. Cite the source in parentheses after the end of the Q then place the *sentence period* after the parenthetical citation.  
Example:
    - ii. *Block* the Q if it runs over four typed lines of your essay's text. Indent each line of a blocked Q one inch (or ten spaces) from the left margin and run the line all the way to the essay's regular margin on the right. Double space the Q just as you do the normal text. Do not use Q-marks to set off blocked quotations (the blocking itself sets off the Q). End the Q with proper punctuation (period or ellipsis), then type the parenthetical citation (note that this differs slightly from the punctuation of the citation in embedded Qs described just above). *You need no Q-marks for blocked Qs of narration;* you may need Q-marks if your blocked Q includes dialogue.

**b. Know when to EMBED or BLOCK a POETRY quotation:**

- i. If the Q is three or fewer lines of the poem, embed it (place it in quotation marks and incorporated it into the text of your essay). Verse line breaks affect the way we read a poem, so separate any two verse lines in a single embedded poetry Q with slash mark (/) flanked by a space on either side. Cite the numbers of the quoted verse line or lines in parentheses at the end of the quotation then place the *sentence period* after the parenthetical citation.
  
- ii. If you quote more than three lines of the poem, *block* it. Indent each line one inch (ten spaces) from the left margin. *Strive to reproduce the spacing and layout of the poem as it appears on the published page you are quoting.* If you begin quoting in the middle of a line, place the start of the partial line as it appears on the published page instead of shifting it to the left-hand quotation margin. If you reach your right margin before you've typed a whole poetic line, place the line's continuation on the next line of your paper after an additional indentation of a quarter-inch (three spaces); alternatively, you may reduce the overall indentation of the quotation to less than an inch (ten spaces) if the reduction will enable you to minimize or eliminate such continuations. *You need no Q-marks for most blocked Qs of verse unless quoted dialogue occurs within the poem.* Where you'd cite page numbers in parentheses for a prose quotation, cite line numbers when quoting a poem.

**5. CITE the SOURCE.** Place the page number or numbers alone (no "p." or "l.") in parentheses after the end of the quotation. If you need to cite more than one author's work in your essay, include the last name of the quoted author in the parenthetical citation [*e.g.* (Hawthorne 76)] and list complete bibliographical information for the texts to which you've referred in a "Works Cited" page at the end of the essay (see the model of MLA bibliography format in Appendix J of *A Manual For Student Research Projects* distributed to all upper school students by the JBS history department).

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**APPENDIX B. SOME TRANSITIONAL MARKERS**

**A shrewdly selected transition shows the reader not only *that* two ideas are related but *how* they are related. The partial list below groups some common transitions by *function*.**

**1. TO SHOW THAT ONE IDEA ADDS TO OR COMPARES WITH ANOTHER**

again            also            and then        another        as well as     besides  
                  even more     further            furthermore    in addition     first  
likewise            moreover        next            last            too            not only...but  
also  
                  still others     similarly        some            once more     either...or

**2. TO SHOW THAT ONE IDEA CONTRASTS WITH ANOTHER**

but            yet            and yet            in contrast     even so  
in spite of    nevertheless    however            rather            still  
whereas        unfortunately    while            on the other hand  
neither...nor    at the same time

**3. TO SHOW THAT ONE IDEA CAUSES OR RESULTS FROM ANOTHER**

accordingly    as a result     consequently    otherwise     in short        therefore  
hence            then            thus            truly            since            in this way  
to this end

**4. TO SHOW THAT ONE IDEA EXPLAINS OR EXEMPLIFIES ANOTHER**

for example    for instance    in particular    specifically    namely            in  
other words  
                  consider        take, for example

**5. TO SHOW THAT ONE IDEA CONFIRMS ANOTHER**

indeed            in fact            in truth            surely            certainly        clearly

**6. TO SHOW THE TIME RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ONE IDEA AND ANOTHER**

afterward     later            while            at last            at length        eventually  
immediately    soon            at once            meanwhile     presently        next  
                  thereafter     as soon as     as long as     lately            since            earlier

**7. TO SHOW THAT ONE IDEA SUMMARIZES OR CONCLUDES ANOTHER**

in conclusion    finally            in short            in brief            in any event    to sum up  
in sum            in the end        on the whole     in essence        ultimately        after all

**APPENDIX C.**

**SOME COMMON PITFALLS IN JBS FRESHMAN ENGLISH ESSAYS:  
A BRIEF LIST**

## 1. Sentence Level

- comma splices
- sentence fragments
- modifier problems (dangling modifiers and misplaced modifiers)
- repetitious or imprecise word choice
- overuse of linking verbs (especially “to be”) instead of action verbs
- overuse of passive voice instead of active voice
- unnecessary shifting of verb tense (usually from present to past and back)<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Argument Level

- mismanaged paragraphing (especially underdevelopment or overextension of paragraphs)
- missing transitions
- missing, insubstantial, or underanalyzed evidence
- generic or missing titles (a title should hint at your *angle* not just your topic)
- underworked rough drafts

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<sup>2</sup> In general, use *present tense* when referring what is happening in a *creative work* (novel, short story, poem, play, film, painting, musical composition, etc.). Use *past tense* when referring to things that actually happened.

