

THE LITERARY ESSAY

All students must submit a literary essay as part of the Graduation Portfolio. Your essay must meet the standards as given in the Rubric for evaluating the essay which follows.

Please refer to the rubric in developing your essay.

PERFORMANCE BASED ASSESSMENT TASKS THAT MEET AND EXCEED NYS REGENTS STANDARDS
Literary Paper
TASK: ANALYTIC PAPER

Performance Indicators	Outstanding	Good	Competent	Needs Revision
Critical Lens	Efficiently organizes assertions and analysis around a central idea; uses convincing evidence to support the analysis; develops essay coherently and persuasively	Organizes assertions and analysis around a central idea; uses relevant evidence to support the analysis; develops essay coherently	Has central controlling idea; uses relevant evidence throughout the essay; analyzes rather than summarizes	Summarizes or uses faulty analysis; lacks controlling idea; little or no evidence used
Connections	Makes insightful connections between two or more literary works and other issues; historical setting, genre, contemporary concerns	Makes appropriate connections between two or more literary works and other issues; historical settings, genre, contemporary concerns	Makes appropriate connections between two or more literary works	Makes inappropriate or no connection between texts
Literary Technique	Demonstrates sophisticated understanding of complex literary techniques (e.g. irony and allusion)	Demonstrates understanding of a variety of literary techniques (e.g. point of view and metaphor)	Demonstrates understanding of basic literary techniques (e.g. theme and character development)	Demonstrates little understanding of literary techniques
Style	Uses confident writing style; evidence of distinctive student voice; may use literary techniques (e.g. style and metaphor)	Writing is clear and focused; evidence of student voice emerging	Writing communicates ideas clearly	Writing lacks clarity
Conventions	Mechanical errors are rare or non-existent; follows accepted conventions of quotations and citations	Few mechanical errors; follows accepted conventions of quotations and citations	Some mechanical errors but communication is not impaired; demonstrates knowledge of accepted conventions of quotations and citations	Communication is impaired by errors; little or no use of conventions of quotation and citation
External Assessment and Validation	Communicates clear message in appropriate, sophisticated, and original way to audience Present complex, accurate, substantive information and ideas in an organized way	Communicates clear message in appropriate, and original way to audience Present substantive accurate information and ideas in organized way	Communicates clear message in appropriate way to audience Present some substantive, accurate information and ideas in an organized way	Message not clear or appropriate to audience Does not present accurate or substantive information or ideas not organized

Guide to the Compare/Contrast Literary Essay for Graduation Portfolio

This literary essay compares two works of literature. These may be short stories, novels, poems, non-fiction, plays, memoirs, biographies etc.

Write a literary essay in which you discuss two works of literature you have read. Identify a theme common to both works of literature. Theme is the idea about the human experience that is revealed in the story. In your essay, provide a thorough explanation of the theme you chose. Support your ideas by using references to literary elements and literary devices.

- Introduce the theme you have chosen that you will use to discuss the two stories
- Identify two works of literature and name the authors.
- Avoid plot summary. Instead use specific references to literary elements (for example: theme, characterization, setting, point of view) to develop your analysis
- Organize your ideas (AB, AB, AB or A, then B)

Below are some examples of works of literature, the topics of those books and themes that relate to the stories. Think about the topic and theme of the two works you will use and begin to plan an outline.

Of Mice and Men by

John Steinbeck

Topic: Loyalty

Theme: Friendship requires sacrifice

Loyalty can lead to destruction.

Romeo and Juliet by

William Shakespeare

Topic: Young love

Theme: Young love can

lead to extreme action.

HOW TO WRITE A LITERARY ESSAY

Literary Essay: An organized collection of your ideas about literary texts, nicely written and professionally presented.

Following are five approaches to a literary essay. Look at them and find the one that is right for you.

1. **BUILD ON A LITERARY ARGUMENT:** Either your own or an ongoing literary discussion
2. **COMPARE AND CONTRAST TWO WORKS OF LITERATURE:** Identify a common theme in two works of literature
3. **DESCRIBE AN ASPECT OF A LITERARY WORK:** For example, analyze character(s), theme(s), regionalism, irony, allusion, imagery, etc.
4. **DISCOVER AND DISCUSS A PATTERN IN A SERIES OF AN AUTHOR'S WORK:** Revisit your favorite author's work in an analysis of recurring themes, characters, settings, etc.
5. **EXPLORE THE AUTHOR'S LIFE:** And how it relates to his/her literary work

Begin by choosing literature that means something to you, or an author who has had an impact on your life. Write the essay by using the following outline which can be modified to fit your subject and approach.

I. The Introduction

Generally the introduction is one to three paragraphs. It should include:

- A. the thesis,
- B. your approach,
- C. the names of the works and authors to be discussed.

II. – IV The Body

A. Paragraph one:

1. Discuss the literary argument's history, or
2. Introduce the first piece of literature, or
3. Describe and define the first literary aspect, or
4. Begin the dissection of the pattern, or
5. Begin the description of the author's life.

B. Paragraphs three and so on

Continue the body of the essay with your discussion comparison, description, definition, dissection or argument.

III. The Conclusion

- A. Brings the analysis to a close. You may put your personal reaction here.

IMPORTANT TIPS TO REMEMBER!

Before beginning: organize your thoughts in an outline.

Make connections to other works and/or issues, historical settings, genre, contemporary concerns.

Write an interesting opening paragraph with a clearly defined thesis statement.

Put quotes into your work.

K.I.S.S.

Write coherent paragraphs that are headed by topic sentences.

Craft a thoughtful and inspiring conclusion.

When writing a literary essay or analysis, remember to use plot sparingly. You are not writing a book report.

Find your voice. Communicate clearly and persuasively.

No typos allowed!

What is the proper form for the essay?

All essays should be typed, double-spaced, in well formed paragraphs with an introduction, body and conclusion. The bibliography should be in the proper MLA style. The cover sheet should include: the title of the essay, your name, the date and your advisor's name.

What exactly is a paragraph?

In the case of a literary essay, a paragraph should be about a third of the page (double spaced). Each paragraph has a topic sentence, near the beginning, which states the paragraph's theme. The first sentence should be linked to, or contrast from, the last sentence of the previous paragraph. The most important thing about the literary essay paragraph is that it is a solid unit that develops a clearly defined sub-theme of the essay.

How many drafts do I need to write?

As many as it takes to make the essay coherent, cohesive, readable, interesting and grammatically correct.

What should my literary essay be about?

There are many approaches to the literary essay. Some approaches are:

- M Compare and contrast two works of literature.
- M Build on an ongoing literary argument
- M Describe and analyze an aspect (i.e. irony, metaphor, allusion, imagery, etc.) of a literary work.
- M Discuss a pattern in a favorite author's works.
- M Explore an author's life and its influence on his/her work.

How long does it need to be?

Talk to your English teacher and/or advisor. Is three pages enough? Is ten pages too long? The length of the paper depends upon the subject matter.

FAQs about the Literary Essay

What is a literary essay?

A literary essay is an organized collection of your ideas about literary text(s) nicely written and professionally presented.

What is the difference between a literary essay and a book report?

A book report is paper that describes the plot of a book. On the other hand, in the literary essay, plot description is used sparingly and only when it supports your central idea.

Why do I need to write a literary essay?

Literary essays are the foundation for good writing. It is also a requirement of your graduation portfolio.

Does my literary essay need a bibliography?

Sometimes. If you are using one work, you can incorporate the citation into the paper. If you are using other sources, you will need to have a bibliography to cite them.

What are primary and secondary sources?

Primary sources are the original words of an individual writer.

In literature, primary sources are: novels, short stories, essays, poems, personal letters, autobiographical sketches, diary or journal entries, and memoirs; films, videos and recordings of performances.

*Secondary sources are works **about** individuals and their work, for example, biographies, histories, critical studies of literature.*

In literature, secondary sources include: articles, reviews, critical studies, and books about literary works and writers.

Should I include quotes from the literature in my essay?

Absolutely. Quotes support your thesis, make your argument, show a literary device and/or illustrate a pattern in an author's work. By using quotes effectively, you show the reader the point of your essay.