**WRITING A LITERARY RESPONSE/ANALYSIS IN PARAGRAPH OR ESSAY FORM**

**FORMAT IS ESSENTIAL IN WRITING A RESPONSE FOR AN EXAM OR ASSIGNMENT.**

When asked to write a response paragraph or essay, follow the following format and guidelines:

1. **Universal statement or Hook** – Start with a statement which introduces the overall concept of your paragraph or essay and hooks the reader’s interest. This could be a quote, a fact, a question or any other general statement which gives the reader the focus of the paragraph or essay. It should be directly related to the rest of the paragraph.
2. **Introduce the question** or issue which is being addressed being sure to **include author, title of piece and key words** from the question.
3. **Don’t forget to PEE** – make your point, include an example from the text (quote or reference) and explain/expand upon that point. Be sure that your reference/quote includes some **context** from the text - when, who said it, what was going on when it occurred.
4. **Three is the magic number** – unless otherwise stated in the question, include **three points** to answer the question. A general guideline is to include a reference from the beginning of the piece, from the middle (at a key turning point or crisis is helpful) and from the end of the piece.
5. **End conclusively** – Finish with a final summation of the answer, WITHOUT MERELY RESTATING WHAT YOU’VE ALREADY TOLD US. Shorter is better – get to the point

**HELPFUL HINTS:**

1. Avoid using first person (I) in your answer. This is literary analysis. Use “the reader” where you might be tempted to use “I”.
2. Stick to the text rather than opinion or ‘soap box’ proclamations. Unless the question asks you to evaluate or give your opinion, don’t.
3. Use formal language as this is a formal task.
4. Refer to the author by his/her last name NOT his/her first as using a first name suggests you are personally acquainted with him/her and takes away from the formal nature of your paragraph or essay. You might be tempted to refer to “Good old Bill” but stating “Shakespeare is over-rated” is much more appropriate.

Writing a literary paragraph: step-by-step guide.

**Assignment: Write a literary paragraph for the characters George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*.**

Sample topic: Compare and contrast the characters of Scout and Jem from Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* in a literary paragraph of 300-400 words.

1. Come up with a thesis statement that relates to the topic.

In Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the characters of Scout and Jem can be viewed as character foils, since, even though they are siblings who enjoy many of the same games, they are opposite to one another in many ways.

1. State the first **point** that supports the thesis:

The first difference between them is an obvious but important one: Scout is a girl and Jem is a boy.

1. Describe the **evidence** from the text that supports this point:

In the time period in which the story is set, the gender difference leads to differing expectations for each child: no one questions Jem playing active games outdoors, whereas Scout is asked by her Aunt Alexandria to come and “speak to these ladies” and made to feel shame if she is “mud-covered”, as she usually is (p. 149).

1. **Explain** the evidence you have included and how it illustrates your point.

Scout clearly doesn’t fit into the ideas her Aunt has about being a lady. Jem, on the other hand, is left alone to play outdoors because he is a boy.

1. Include a **transition** to your next point.

Also unladylike, and also contrasting to Jem…

1. Repeat transitions and **point-evidence-explanation** two more times to thoroughly explain your thesis. (**POINTS are in bold;** *EXPLANATIONS are in italics)*

…also contrasting to Jem is Scout’s impulsivity. **Where Scout is impulsive, Jem is thoughtful.** For example, when Scout rubs Walter Cunningham’s nose in the dirt for getting her in trouble at school, Jem stops her. Where Scout is quick to dismiss Walter, Jem reflects on who Walter is and invites him to their house for lunch when he realizes that Walter is the son of their father’s friend. *Jem’s thoughtfulness counters Scout’s impulsivity, and leads to a change in heart about Walter by Scout as well.* **This thoughtfulness of Jem’s also leads him to be a leader in their games, and in life, where Scout generally follows Jem even if she disagrees with him.** An example of this can be seen when Jem and Scout are walking home together in the dark after their school performance and realize they are being followed. Though both children hear noises, it is Jem who understands that this could be a real threat to them, and Jem who tells Scout to “Run Scout, run!” (p. 300). *He takes a leadership role in trying to protect his sister at his own expense.*

1. Write a conclusion that summarizes your main point and, if possible, explains the significance of the discussion.

Clearly, though Jem and Scout are siblings, they have opposing qualities that make them an interesting pair. Their opposite natures provide the reader with examples of two characters who, through their differences, show that people who are opposite from one another may in fact bring out one another’s positive qualities.

**All in all, when you are done, the paragraph should look something like this:**

In Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the characters of Scout and Jem can be viewed as character foils, since, even though they are siblings who enjoy many of the same games, they are opposite to one another in many ways. The first difference between them is an obvious but important one: Scout is a girl and Jem is a boy. In the time period in which the story is set, the gender difference leads to differing expectations for each child: no one questions Jem playing active games outdoors, whereas Scout is asked by her Aunt Alexandria to come and “speak to these ladies” and made to feel shame if she is “mud-covered”, as she usually is (p. 149). Scout clearly doesn’t fit into the ideas her Aunt has about being a lady. Jem, on the other hand, is left alone to play outdoors because he is a boy. Also unladylike, and also contrasting to Jem, is Scout’s impulsivity: where Scout is impulsive, Jem is thoughtful. For example, when Scout rubs Walter Cunningham’s nose in the dirt for getting her in trouble at school, Jem stops her. Where Scout is quick to dismiss Walter, Jem reflects on who Walter is and invites him to their house for lunch when he realizes that Walter is the son of their father’s friend. Jem’s thoughtfulness counters Scout’s impulsivity and leads to a change in heart about Walter by Scout as well. This thoughtfulness of Jem’s also leads him to be a leader in their games, and in life, where Scout generally follows Jem even if she disagrees with him. An example of this can be seen when Jem and Scout are walking home together in the dark after their school performance and realize they are being followed. Though both children hear noises, it is Jem who understands that this could be a real threat to them, and Jem who tells Scout to “Run Scout, run!” (p. 300). He takes a leadership role in trying to protect his sister at his own expense. Clearly, though Jem and Scout are siblings, they have opposing qualities that make them an interesting pair. Their opposite natures provide the reader with examples of two characters who, through their differences, show that people who are opposite from one another may in fact bring out one another’s positive qualities.

(389 words)