

Name: _____

Miss Skirtich

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English 12: British Literature

How to Prepare a Thesis Paper

Step-by-Step Instruction

When composing a thesis paper, use these easy steps to organize your thoughts and make your writing flow smoothly.

1. **Compose your thesis statement.** This statement must be an opinion, meaning that it is something that can be argued. It cannot be a fact. Moreover, it should follow the list format.
 - a. Example of thesis statement: *Stoker infuses the gothic fiction elements of damsels in distress, eerie settings, and suspenseful events throughout Dracula.*
 - b. In the above example, you will notice that the listed items of *damsels in distress, eerie settings, and suspenseful events* are all in different colors. This means that each one of these listed reasons will become its own body paragraph. If you find that you cannot write about one of the listed reasons in your paper for an entire paragraph, then you need to rethink your listed reason.

2. **Outline your paper.** Taking your thesis statement and its color-coordinated list of reasons, chop it up and make each reason listed its own body paragraph. Each listed reason should be the topic sentence of that paragraph. Just simply cut and paste, reusing the same wording from your thesis statement in each topic sentence
 - a. Example of thesis statement: *Stoker infuses the gothic fiction elements of damsels in distress, eerie settings, and suspenseful events throughout Dracula.*
 - b. Example of topic sentence #1 in body paragraph #1: *Stoker infuses the gothic fiction elements of damsels in distress throughout Dracula.*
 - c. Example of topic sentence #2 in body paragraph #2: *Additionally, Stoker infuses the gothic fiction elements of eerie settings throughout Dracula.*
 - d. Example of topic sentence #3 in body paragraph #2: *Finally, Stoker infuses the gothic fiction elements of suspenseful events throughout Dracula.*
 - e. Notice in the above examples how the words in **blue** are reused over and over again. These come directly from your thesis statement. Each topic sentence changes with the reason listed. The only other change that occurs here are in the 2nd and 3rd topic sentences with the words in **red**, which indicate transition words to make your writing flow more smoothly. You can also swap out the verbs here with a synonym to further spice up your writing (for example, use *implements* instead of *infuses*)

3. **Find citations for your body paragraphs 1st!** Contrary to what most students think, a paper should NEVER start to be drafted in the introduction paragraph. This might seem strange, but the easiest part to start writing about is the meat of your paper, i.e. the body paragraphs. Use your topic sentences to direct your writing. That means that the total number of quotations for your paper should be at least 6 in total (2 per body paragraph!)
 - a. Each body paragraph needs at least 2 pieces of textual evidence to support the argument in the paragraph. More than 2 pieces of textual evidence is awesome, but never use less than that. Otherwise, your argument will not be as credible or believable. Cite your textual evidence with direct quotations from the text.
 - b. Example of topic sentence #1 in body paragraph #1: *Stoker infuses the gothic fiction elements of damsels in distress throughout Dracula.*
 - i. Quote #1: A woman ought to tell her husband everything—don't you think so, dear? (Stoker 40).

- ii. Quote #2: I must stop, for Jonathan is waking—I must attend to my husband! (Stoker 77).
 - c. Follow this format for each of your body paragraphs, using your topic sentences to guide which quotations you should look for in the text. Make sure that the quotation that you use supports your topic sentence. If it doesn't support it, look for another quotation instead.
4. **Build your body paragraphs.** After you find your textual evidence, you want to start to compose your body paragraphs. Follow this formula to make your writing a breeze:
 - a. Topic Sentence: *Stoker infuses the gothic fiction elements of damsels in distress throughout Dracula.*
 - b. Introduce your quote in a few words: *One instance in which damsels in distress come into play occurs when Mina and Lucy are talking about their fiancés in their letter correspondences, "A woman ought to tell her husband everything—don't you think so, dear? (Stoker 40).*
 - c. Explain how your quote supports your topic sentence for at least 2 sentences: *In this quote, Lucy and Mina correspond to each other about their respective engagements via letter. Each woman fantasizes about her own marriage, home, and husband, thinking only about their wifely duties. The idea that these women act so dependently upon men in their lives reinforces the Victorian ideals that women are submissive and in need of men to direct their own lives.*
 - d. Transition to next quote and introduce quote in a few words. *Another example of damsels in distress in the novel crops up when Mina cuts off writing a letter to Lucy in order to attend to her sick husband, Jonathan, "I must stop, for Jonathan is waking—I must attend to my husband! (Stoker 77).*
 - e. Explain how your quote supports your topic sentence for at least 2 sentences: *In this instance from the text, Mina has been corresponding with Lucy from the hospital bedside from where her new husband, Jonathan, stays while he recovers from his escapades in Transylvania. As a diligent and proper wife, Mina attends to Jonathan at his every waking call, neglecting her own needs and desires so that she serves him with care and dutiful lovingness.*
 - f. Wrap up your paragraph by reiterating your topic sentence: *Mina and Lucy directly reinforces the the gothic fiction elements of damsels in distress throughout Dracula.*
 - g. Follow this pattern for each of your body paragraphs.
5. **Work on your introduction paragraph.** After you complete your 3 body paragraphs, go back to the beginning and write your introduction paragraph. Follow these steps:
 - a. Start with an attention grabber or hook for your reader: *Blood thirsty vampires and squealing women in distress captivate readers of all ages, especially those who desire a dark kind of tale.*
 - b. Include background information about the author, the time period, and the text: *Irish born Bram Stoker uses the Victorian era influences, such as dark, grotesque, nail-biting features to keep his readers interested and scared all at once.*
 - c. Slam them with your thesis statement: *Stoker infuses the gothic fiction elements of damsels in distress, eerie settings, and suspenseful events throughout Dracula.*
6. **Work on your conclusion paragraph.** After you compose your introduction paragraph, your conclusion should be the very last thing that you work on for your paper. Follow these steps:
 - a. Reiterate your thesis statement: *In conclusion, Stoker infuses the gothic fiction elements of damsels in distress, eerie settings, and suspenseful events throughout Dracula.*
 - b. Wrap up your 3 body paragraphs and give the reader a life lesson: *Readers throughout the decades shriek and cower at the many gothic elements incorporated throughout the text, making sure that vampires and their aftermath never seem too far out of the realm of possibility when reading this page-turning adventure of gothic doom.*