

LITERATURE PAPER CHECKLIST

There's no one "right way" to write a literature paper. Some are two or three pages long; others are twenty or more. Most, however, include the following elements. If you haven't written a lot of literature papers before, this checklist can help you become aware of many readers' expectations.

■ Introduction

- A paragraph like any other: 1/4-1/3 page long, 80+ words.
- Includes the title of the work you're writing about and the author's name. Even if the work is in the title of your essay, you still have to include it in your introduction. Put story and poem titles in quotation marks; underline or italicize book and play titles.

Edgar Allen Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" is a horror classic.

- Includes some context. You might say something about other stories by the same author, or other stories of the same kind; you might say something about the author's life or relevant events happening at the time this story was written. You could mention a current story or event that seems related, explaining how. It's up to you!
- Often includes a one- or two-sentence overview of the work:

The Italian nobleman Montresor tricks his enemy Fortunato into walking deep into his dungeons by promising him a taste of wine, then bricks him up and leaves him to die.

- Usually ends with your thesis--the main point you want to make.

Poe uses setting in this story to show how creepy the murder is.

■ Body Paragraphs

- At least three or four, each 1/4-1/3 page long, 80+ words.
- Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence that makes a claim supporting your thesis. The rest of the paragraph will back it up.

Most of the action takes place in Montresor's wine cellar, which is a frightening and unpleasant place.

- Each uses two or more citations from the text to back up its claims. Statements of simple fact ("they meet in the carnival season") do not usually need to be supported by quotations. Interpretive statements--ideas that someone else reading the same story might not recognize or agree with--do.

Montresor deliberately tries to make the dungeon seem even creepier by pointing out the cold (76) and damp (78).

- Each quotation is followed by a sentence or two explaining exactly how and why you believe it proves your point. Do **not** assume that the connection is obvious.

Since everything else Montresor says to Fortunato (such as offering to ask Luchresi's opinion of the wine instead) is obviously manipulative, it can be assumed that these statements are manipulative, too. By making Fortunato aware of his surroundings, he is increasing his victim's suffering.

- Each **avoids summarizing**, instead using examples from the text to prove your claims. Instead of just writing that Montresor urges Fortunato to leave the cellar four times, or describing each time he does so, focus instead on the point you're trying to prove. If you are arguing that Montresor is manipulative, explain what's so manipulative about each of these incidents.
- Each sticks with one verb tense: present tense is usually preferred for writing about literature.

■ Citations

- Paraphrased material is followed by the page number in parentheses:

Fortunato keeps coughing (71).

- Short quotations are followed by the page number in parentheses:

They walk "through long walls of piled skeletons" (72).

- Two- and three-line quotations of poetry are separated by forward slashes with spaces on each side. Copy the capitalization and punctuation of the original exactly.

"We real cool. We / Left school. We"

- Longer quotations (more than four lines of prose, more than three lines of poetry) are double-indented (ten spaces) and followed by a page citation in parentheses. They are not put in quotation marks.
- However, most poetic quotations should be short enough that you can discuss each part of them intensively before moving on. There is rarely any good reason to quote a whole stanza.
- Direct quotations should make up no more than ten percent of your paper.

■ Conclusion

- A paragraph like any other: 1/4-1/3 page long, 80+ words.
- Restates your thesis, or sums it up in one sentence for the first time.
- Includes at least one new (but closely related) observation or quotation; does not merely repeat what has already been said.