

Writing Tips

- **Introductions:**

Your introduction needs to contextualize your argument; that is, it needs to provide the key historical, cultural, political, or literary information that will help your reader understand your thesis and claims. (For instance, if you are arguing that an artwork challenges the mainstream media's representation of 9/11, your thesis should explain that representation in your intro and then make a thesis statement arguing about *how* the artist challenges it.)

Your introduction should also provide basic information about the writings or artworks you are discussing, such as the full name of the author and title, the genre of the text, the time period, etc.

For a 6-7 page paper, your intro should be approx. 2/3 to 1 page.

- **Thesis:**

Your thesis should make a clear, precise argument about the text. Use active verbs such as endorses, advocates, celebrates, reinforces, critiques, condemns, challenges...

It can be more than one sentence. It should directly answer the question in the prompt.

Since you are analyzing the works of authors, designers, and artists, your thesis should probably mention the artist or project and explain how the work contributes to a specific understanding of 9/11, through *both* form (how it is composed) and content (what it says/does).

- **Topic sentences:**

Like the thesis, your topic sentences (launching each body paragraph) should also be argumentative. A strong topic sentence will not just summarize details; rather, it will make a claim that interprets the significance of those details. (Therefore, someone should be able to disagree with the claim.) It should link back to the thesis but be more specific. Think of it as a subset of the thesis.

Making strong claims in your topic sentences will also help you to avoid lapsing into summary/description.

Weak topic sentence:

The beginning of the film consists only of a black screen.

Average topic sentence:

The black screen at the opening contrasts with the news media's view of the spectacle.

Strong topic sentence:

Gonzales-Iñarritu employs a black screen in order to remove the viewer from the media's visual spectacle of 9/11, allowing a deeper focus on the sounds from that day.

- **Evidence**

Introduce it, use it, analyze it, cite it when appropriate.

Support each body paragraph with evidence in the form of quotations or detailed descriptions of the form and/or content of an artwork. Be sure to introduce quotations or descriptions with an introductory phrase that gives the reader any information he/she needs to understand the quote (for instance, who the speaker of the quotation is.) When analyzing photographs, architecture, and other visual arts, get highly detailed in your analysis of the composition.

All of your quotations or descriptions of the formal characteristics of artworks should be followed up by significant analysis (usually several sentences). Analysis should outweigh evidence, preferably by a 2-1 margin.

- **Mechanics and Style:**

Avoid terms that generalize reader response or emphasize how thoroughly you have read the text. (If you are analyzing a text, it is assumed that you have examined it thoroughly.) Examples: "It is obvious," "It becomes clear to the reader," "Upon closer examination, the reader understands..."

When analyzing literature and art, use the present tense. Only use past tense when giving the historical background in your intro.

~~Don't~~ Do not use contractions in formal writing.

Check for spelling errors, typos, etc. I suggest reading your paper aloud or having someone else check the style/grammar.