

Poe's Unreliable Narrator Essay

Many of Poe's short stories are effective in their portrayal of terror and madness precisely because the narrators of these stories cannot be trusted to tell the truth. In a five paragraph essay explain how this statement is true.

As in any analytical essay, you will need to:

- provide an introduction that includes the author's name, the title of the stories, and a clear claim that addresses the topic and, of course, the meaning of the work as a whole
- begin each body paragraph with a topic sentence that is directly related to your claim
- include ample evidence from the text that supports your claim
- introduce all quotations prior to citing them with context
- provide detailed *analysis* following each quotation that demonstrates how the quotation supports your argument – analyze *how* stylistic devices convey meaning - (remember for every argument you have you should have at least two quotes to support it)
- analytical essays do not use ANY form of "I" (me, you, I, etc.)
- include a conclusion that reiterates, but does not repeat, your thesis
- eradicate all spelling, grammatical and typographical errors
- follow MLA formatting and citation guidelines (double space, 1" margins, proper citation of quotes, etc.). Format: (Poe Page #). For example: (Poe 24).

Due Dates _____.

Step 1:

I am giving you a thesis statement and a very basic outline to assist you in your writing. Your job is to complete ONLY your first BODY paragraph. Be sure to include supporting evidence with an MLA cited quote.

Thesis Statement: Edgar Allan Poe's use of an unreliable narrator is evident in the short stories, "The Black Cat", "The Pit and the Pendulum", and "The Cask of Amontillado".

Body Paragraph 1:

The Black Cat

- Begins the story by telling us that the story he is telling us is wildly unbelievable and coincidental.
- He is known as a good person, well known, respected- LOVES animals especially cats and dogs AND he believes that friendship with cats and dogs are incomparable to a human friendship.
- Alcohol abuse/demeanor changes- becomes violent to wife and cat. Think about the mindset of someone who is always intoxicated or delusional.
- How he treats the cat(s).

****Keep in mind that if he has to tell us that everything that has happened is purely coincidental yet wilding unbelievable, we may not be able to trust his word!****

The Formula:

Start off with a generalized statement about the narrator in "The Black Cat" and how he could be considered to be unreliable. Then choose 2 to 3 supporting points. Very specifically, explain how the narrator exemplifies that trait. Back up your claim with a quote from the book that best shows what you're trying to prove. Then explain how the quote you've chosen proves your claim.

The Quotes:

When you include quotations, make sure that they are integrated smoothly into the argument, flow, and syntax of the paper without any logical or grammatical jolts. All borrowed ideas or words should be accompanied by a signal phrase that names the author. The best signal phrases connect the quote to the point you are trying to make / argue:

EXAMPLE: Poe demonstrates the narrator's unreliability, *QUOTE HERE (Poe 24)*. By doing _____, the narrator clearly demonstrates the traits of being unreliable.

Note that in the example, the quotation is followed by commentary where you the writer discusses the opinion or information presented. To allow for this in your writing, avoid ending a paragraph with a quote; instead, use another sentence or phrase to emphasize the importance or relevance of that quote for your purposes or thesis.

Remember: a quotation is any excerpt from the work NOT just dialogue!

Verbs can be used to introduce summaries, paraphrases, and quotations that indicate the author's point of view on the topic, thus adding to your rhetorical power.

Author is neutral	Author implies or suggests	Author argues claims	Author is uneasy or disagrees	Author agrees
comments	analyzes	contends	disparages	admits
describes	asks	defends	belittles	agrees
explains	assesses	disagrees	bemoans	concedes
illustrates	concludes	holds	complains	concur
notes	finds	insists	condemns	grants
observes	predicts	maintains	deplores	
points out	proposes		deprecates	
records	reveals		derides	
relates	shows		laments	
reports	speculates		warns	
says	suggests			
sees	supposes			
thinks				
writes				

Step 2:

I am giving you a thesis statement and a very basic outline to assist you in your writing. Your job is to complete ONLY your SECOND BODY paragraph. Be sure to include supporting evidence with an MLA cited quote.

Thesis Statement: Edgar Allan Poe's use of an unreliable narrator is evident in the short stories, "The Black Cat", "The Pit and the Pendulum", and "The Cask of Amontillado".

Body Paragraph 2:

"The Cask of Amontillado"

- Our narrator, Montressor is telling the story 50 years after the event happened
- He becomes insulted by Fortunato for reasons unknown but it immediately results in the death of him
- REVENGE! Think about the mindset of someone who seeks it
- The murder is premeditated
- The simple fact that he is telling this story in a bragging manner
- Unsympathetic, phony- acts like nothing is wrong

****Keep in mind if he's capable of plastering Fortunato into a vault, we can't trust him. If he's lying, and he didn't kill Fortunato, then we still can't trust him!****

The Difference Between Summarizing and Analyzing

Summary

- A. Recounts all of the major actions that constitute the plot and so describes the entire work in a chronological order.
- B. It tells “what happens next” and emphasizes the connections between these events.

Literary Analysis

- A. Focuses on one small part of the work perhaps its imagery, characterization, setting or theme. This narrowing of the subject permits you to delve more deeply into the topic.
- B. In proving your thesis, you may choose evidence from any part of the work; you are not restricted by the chronological order of the events. In fact, you will probably not even mention most of the events in the work since you will be concentrating only on those that directly relate to your thesis.
- C. Analysis breaks a work into its constituent parts and permits you to concentrate your attention in a limited area.

Detailed Tips for Writing Your Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs are very specific and contain quotations and relevant concrete details from the work to prove the thesis statement

Start with:

1. Topic Sentence

- a. Generally relates to a particular aspect of the thesis statement.
- b. Repeat key words from the thesis as the controlling or main idea in your topic sentence.
- c. A topic sentence is a limited generalization that will be proven with evidence from the work.

2. Introductory Information/ Background of Example that Proves Your Argument

- a. Introduces your argumentative point.
- b. Prepares for the quote by briefly describing the situation it is taken from and by naming the speaker and/or listener if dialogue is quoted
- c. Increases the coherence of the paragraph. One cannot simply jump from the topic sentence into a quotation; it must be properly introduced.

3. Quote from the Work that Proves the Topic Sentence/Provide Evidence

4. Analysis/Explanation Showing WHY and HOW the Quote Proves the Topic Sentence

- a. Analysis goes BEHIND the obvious meaning of the quote to focus on the implications and connotations of the quoted details.
It is imperative that you select quotes carefully!
- b. This analysis is the real content of the essay.
- c. Allows you to comment on the importance, relevance, and significance of the excerpt you have chosen to quote.
- d. A quotation alone is not sufficient in proving your point- like a good lawyer, you must analyze and explain the importance of the evidence.

REPEAT IF USING MORE THAN ONE ARGUMENTATIVE POINT

5. Transitional Words or Sentences to Prepare for a Second Supporting Quotation/Example

6. Introductory Information for the Quotation

7. Quotation that Strongly and Convincingly Supports the Topic Sentence

8. Analysis- Thoroughly Developed- of the Details That Prove The Topic Sentence

OTHERWISE

9. Closing/Summary of that Paragraph Sentence

Step 3:

I am giving you a thesis statement and a very basic outline to assist you in your writing. Your job is to complete your essay...YES COMPLETE YOUR ESSAY by _____. Be sure to include supporting evidence with an MLA cited quote.

Thesis Statement: Edgar Allan Poe's use of an unreliable narrator is evident in the short stories, "The Black Cat", "The Pit and the Pendulum", and "The Cask of Amontillado".

Body Paragraph 3:

The Pit and the Pendulum

- Begins the story by telling us that after he received his death sentence he felt sick and passed out.
- While he's investigating the cell the first time, he slips and collapses and falls asleep.
- After he finds the pit by falling on his face, he falls asleep again.
- He wakes up to find bread and water. After consuming it, he falls asleep.

****Keep in mind that if he keeps falling in and out of consciousness, he may not remember things in their entirety!****

Writing Your Introduction Paragraph

A. Title

- a. Should relate to your thesis
- b. Should tell the reader what your specific subject and its limitations are
- c. Titles should not repeat or refer to the assignment
- d. Titles should attract the reader's attention.

B. Introduction

The introduction begins broadly then narrows to focus clearly on the ideas that will be thoroughly discussed and illustrated in the body of the essay.

1. Functions

- a. To interest the reader
- b. To introduce the subject and its limitations
- c. To state the thesis
- d. To suggest the organization of the essay itself

2. Opening Sentences/The Lead/Grabbers

- a. An appropriate rhetorical question that relates to the subject of your essay
- b. A relevant quotation from the work itself or from another source
- c. A brief passage of dialogue or description from/of the work
- d. A reference to a current issue or problem that relates to the work
- e. A description of your initial response to the work
- f. A shocking, amusing, challenging, or clever generalization that will lead down naturally to your thesis.

3. Background Information

- a. Full name of author (who from then on is referred to by last name ONLY)
- b. Complete title of work
 - i. Short stories and poems are put in quotation marks
 - ii. Books and dramas are italics
- c. If handled effectively, the opening lines can lead smoothly into the necessary background information.

4. Summary of the work

- a. **VERY BRIEF** and general. No more than 2 sentences!
- b. To refresh your reader's memory of the work or to acquaint them with it if they have not read it
- c. Since your purpose is to analyze just ONE component part of the work, by building your summary around the intended subject of the essay, you can begin to narrow your focus to the particular aspect of the work you plan to discuss.

5. Thesis

- a. The last sentence of the introduction
- b. Outlines the body of the essay
- c. States your main argument or what you are trying to prove.

The Formula: Lead/Opening Sentence/Grabber. + Author's name and title of book with brief summary of work. +Thesis

*******REMEMBER I HAVE WRITTEN
THE THESIS STATEMENT FOR YOU!*******

Sample Introduction Paragraph

Edward Murrow once said, “the obscure we see eventually. The completely obvious, it seems, takes longer.” In William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the fast pace of the work lends itself to a literary device which makes the inevitable outcome that much more tragic. Most of the characters in this work act on impulse and rarely consider options that may be otherwise prevented the tragedy. The hot tempers of characters such as Tybalt and Lord Capulet act as a catalyst for the speedy demise of both Mercutio and Juliet respectively, but rarely do they consider how their actions impact others and the choices that other make. However, Shakespeare does give the reader some insight into the ending of the work by providing clues through the words of the characters which, somewhat unbeknownst to them, predict their fatal endings. Shakespeare’s use of foreshadowing from the words of Romeo, Tybalt, and Juliet, denote the eventuality of each character’s actions in the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

Writing Your Conclusion Paragraph

The conclusion allows the reader to realize that you have come to end of your discussion or argument. It is highly important because it is the last thing the reader will read. Therefore it is imperative to make an impact.

1. Functions

- a. The last thing your reader perceives- should leave your reader with a sense of wholeness and completeness
- b. Signal word to let your reader know they are coming to the end of your discussion. (ex. Thus, therefore, ultimately, as a result of, for these reasons, altogether, indeed, due to, overall, definitely, thus, in effect, consequently, etc) *** Stay away from “in conclusion” ***
- c. Summary of your thesis and main points- **NEVER** a word for word repetition of your thesis
- d. Emphasize significance or importance of ideas explored in the paper
- e. Speed and style for a “clincher”
 - i. Brings your ideas together and drives them home in a decisive and conclusive manner
 - ii. Adds finality
 - iii. It is often effective to use the title of your essay or a close variation of it as your last line. (It gives a sense of unity and completeness AND it brings the reader back to the starting point, completing the circle of your journey. I like to think of it as an Oreo cookie!)

Sample Conclusion Paragraph

The characters Romeo, Tybalt, and Juliet all espouse aspects of foreshadowing be they prophetic or based on future promised action. Shakespeare even prefaces aspects of foreshadowing in the prologue of the work when he reminds the reader that Romeo and Juliet will take their own lives. This is done to take the focus off of the actual final actions of the characters and replace the focus on the tragic flaw of impetuosity. Many of the characters in the work succumb to impetuous behavior which drives most of the action of the play. Without this device, the reader may not appreciate what Shakespeare is trying to do in leading up to a somewhat predictable ending for the lives of these characters.

Transitional Words & Phrases

To Add: and, again, and then, besides, equally important, finally, further, furthermore, nor, too, next, lastly, what's more, moreover, in addition, first (second, etc.)	To Compare: whereas, but, yet, on the other hand, however, nevertheless, on the contrary, by comparison, where, compared to, up against, balanced against, but, although, conversely, meanwhile, after all, in contrast, although this may be true
To Prove: because, for, since, for the same reason, obviously, evidently, furthermore, moreover, besides, indeed, in fact, in addition, in any case, that is	To Show Exception: yet, still, however, nevertheless, in spite of, despite, of course, once in a while, sometimes
To Show Time: immediately, thereafter, soon, after a few hours, finally, then, later, previously, formerly, first (second, etc.), next, and then	To Emphasize: definitely, extremely, obviously, in fact, indeed, in any case, absolutely, positively, naturally, surprisingly, always, forever, perennially, eternally, never, emphatically, unquestionably, without a doubt, certainly, undeniably, without reservation
To Repeat: in brief, as has been noted	To Show Sequence: first, second, third, and so forth. next, then, following this, at this time, now, at this point, after, afterward, subsequently, finally, consequently, previously, before this, simultaneously, concurrently, thus, therefore, hence, next, and then, soon
To Give an Example: for example, for instance, in this case, in another case, on this occasion, in this situation, take the case of, to demonstrate, to illustrate, as an illustration, to illustrate	To Summarize or Conclude: in brief, on the whole, summing up, ultimately, hence, therefore, accordingly, thus, as a result, consequently

DO NOT EVER USE
“IN CONCLUSION” OR “ALL IN ALL”
TO START YOUR FINAL PARAGRAPH!!!!