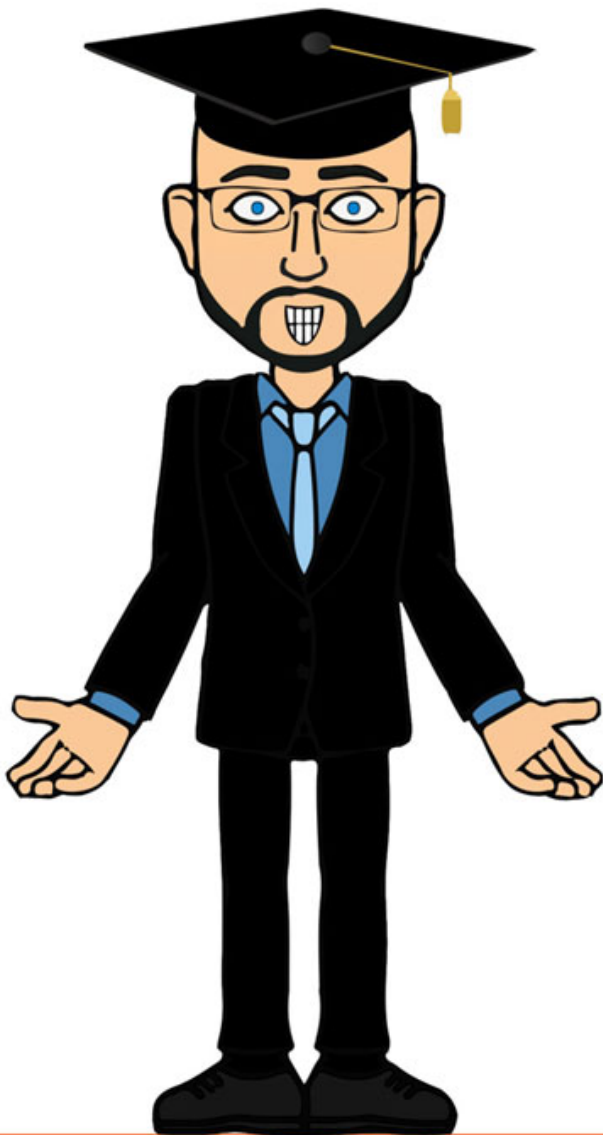


Mr Bruff

ONLINE REVISION

MR Bruff's Guide To

A' Level English Literature



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SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION

Many students struggle with introductions. At all costs, avoid the clunky and boring: 'In this essay, I am going to discuss...' You need to make an interesting point.

So how do you do this? State your point of view (or hypothesis) in a clear, concise way. This is called a **thesis statement** and it is usually one sentence long. You then spend the rest of the essay justifying (or proving) your thesis statement.

If the exam question starts with a quotation, you could summarise it in your own words and link it to the question. Then follow it with your thesis statement.

EXAMPLE INTRODUCTIONS

Example Introduction 1:

'Blake's poetry explores many facets of love.' How far and in which ways do you agree with this view?

Blake's presentation of the different and sometimes contradictory forms of love will be explored by examining poems from *Selected Poems*. I agree that his poetry explores a great many facets of love, but there are also limitations.

This is a very short introduction, but it does focus on the question and have a thesis statement.

A more sophisticated way to develop an introduction would be to begin with a relevant quotation. This could be linked to the key words of the question and then lead to a thesis statement.

Example Introduction 2:

Explore the presentation of men and women in 'Pride and Prejudice'.

The subject of men and women is introduced in the first sentence of the Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with the ironic observation: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife'. This introduces the idea of rational marriage, which is based on economic arrangements. But are all men and women presented in such a mercenary light? I believe that some are, but others are not.

In example 2, we see that an introductory quotation is a good way of introducing one aspect of how men and women are presented. It leads to a pertinent point about marriage and then leads seamlessly to the thesis statement that opens opportunities to cover a wider range of points about relationships and also to disagree with the question.

Another way of structuring an introduction is to contextualise the question by linking it to the background. The thesis statement would then follow.

Example Introduction 3:

Explore the presentation of women in 'Sense and Sensibility'.

In nineteenth century English society, middle and upper class women did not enjoy the same level of education as men, as they were expected to marry and

have children. Prevailing attitudes centred on women being weak and not capable of 'rational' thought. This is a view that was challenged by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. Austen explores contemporary discussions about the nature of women in *Sense and Sensibility*: Elinor Dashwood with her intelligence and practical outlook represents 'sense' and her emotional sister Marianne represents 'sensibility'. This use of antithesis to present women will now be explored.

Whichever method you prefer, remember that a successful introduction is short, establishes basic fact(s) and contains a good thesis statement. This is the foundation for the rest of your essay.

BODY OF ESSAY

Aim to link your topic sentences explicitly to the key words of the question, as this will help to maintain focus. *You* might know how your points connect, but you won't be doing yourself any favours if you expect the examiner to read your mind.

It is worth noting that in the process of writing you might explore points which were not in your plan. This is more likely to be the case if you're writing under pressure in an exam. As long as your points are relevant, this is fine: you don't have to stick to your plan exactly, and the fact that you are developing your thread of discussion or argument through an exploratory approach shows the examiner that you are analysing the text and engaging with it in a personal, creative way.

Always assume the examiner has read the text, so there is no need to narrate the plot. You should focus on quoting and interpreting. This skill is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

USEFUL DISCOURSE MARKERS

When you are writing, you need to signpost your ideas so that the examiner can see how your argument is developing. To do this, you need discourse markers. The ones below are useful for developing and extending your thoughts.

Introducing Ideas

To begin with, ...

Primarily, ...

The writer introduces...

We are introduced to...

Developing Ideas

My initial impression is..., but...

My first impression is..., but...

Upon further examination, ...

Upon further consideration, ...

Having considered this, ...

Having considered this point of view, ...

From this, we can see/note/deduce that...

The reader can see/deduce from this that...

It can be seen/said/noted that...

Not only is/are..., but.....also...

Sequencing Ideas

The writer then...
Moreover, ...
Furthermore...
In addition,

Concluding Ideas

Having considered the evidence, ...
Having considered the evidence that...
Having considered the evidence on both sides, ...
To conclude, ...
In conclusion, ...
It is important to conclude with...
Weighing up the evidence, we can see that...
Finally, ...
Overall, ...

Although these phrases guide your reader through your discussion, try not to overuse them, as you don't want to risk sound artificial. Aim to integrate them seamlessly into your writing.

CONCLUSION

In your conclusion, do not repeat the points that you have already written in the essay. Likewise, do not introduce new material. Instead, reference the exam question, weigh up your thoughts and either confirm your original thesis statement or refine it.

EXAMPLE CONCLUSIONS

This question is based on Shakespeare's play *Anthony and Cleopatra*.

Example Conclusion 1:

'Cleopatra is a manipulative woman, who brings down a worthy soldier and ruler.'

To what extent do you agree with this view? Explore the ways that Shakespeare presents Cleopatra.

To conclude, I believe that it is unjust to label Cleopatra as 'manipulative' and to blame her for Anthony's downfall; this would depict her as an unscrupulous schemer, and there is more 'infinite variety' to her character than that. The play is a tragedy, and this choice of genre heightens the downfall of both protagonists, who have to deal with the political consequences of their love. Cleopatra is a woman in love and, although foolish at times, she does not have the malice and scheming ways of Lady Macbeth. As mentioned above, Anthony is not entirely a worthy soldier, having ignored Enobarbus's sound advice to fight on land where he has the advantage. Moreover, Anthony's decision to follow Cleopatra when she panics at the Battle of Actium is what ultimately leads to his downfall. Like Cleopatra, he is not perfect, but he is certainly not a victim of a manipulative schemer.

Another way to end a conclusion is to include a quotation that summarises your point of view. This can be a powerful technique if you have an appropriate and relevant quotation to hand.

Example Conclusion 2:

W.B. Yeats commented that 'passive suffering is not a theme for poetry'.

How far do you agree that Owen's poetry is too preoccupied with sentimentalising the soldiers?

Finally, when Yeats sneers at Owen, it is because the former believes that soldiers should be described as tragic heroes rather than passive victims. Owen aims to challenge this view and is quick to criticise those who glorify war (*Dulce et Decorum Est*); those who do not understand shellshock (*Mental Cases*) and those who die of exposure in the trenches (*Exposure*). I disagree with Yeats's assessment of Owen's poetry as we all sentimentalise soldiers and I believe that it is our duty to do so. This is seen in the annual remembrance services on 11th November, which help us to remember the sacrifices of the 'doomed youth' from the First World War and the soldiers who fought and died for us in subsequent wars. As Owen states:

'My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity'.

Your conclusion might also move beyond the core text(s) to consider wider significant issues.

Example Conclusion 3:

Explore the ways that the character of Scrooge is used to convey Dickens's attitudes towards the poor.

In conclusion, more than 150 years after the novel was first published, the theme of charity in *A Christmas Carol* is still relevant today. As the old saying affirms, 'money cannot buy happiness', and Scrooge learns that it is kindness to others—and the poor in particular—that brings rewards. Dickens stressed the importance of considering others, and perhaps more people in society would benefit today if they took these maxims to heart.

However you structure your conclusion, remember to express yourself concisely. A conclusion summarises your ideas, so it does not have to be very long.