

## HOW TO WRITE A LITERARY ESSAY

### What is a Literary Essay?

A literary essay is a formal piece of writing where you develop an argument about a text (novel, play, short story, poem, or film) using **textual evidence** and analysis of **authorial choices**.

### 1. Unpack the Essay Question

- Read the question carefully.
- Highlight key words & for each key word write down synonyms, evocations...
- Identify the focus: **theme, character, idea, or technique**.

*Example:*

(Question) "How does Grenville explore the impact of colonisation in *The Secret River*?"

(Focus) Thematic exploration of colonisation.

### 2. Brainstorm & Plan

- List relevant **themes**.
- Identify **key moments** in the text.
- Select **quotes** to support your argument.
- Map out **authorial techniques** (e.g. imagery, narrative structure, symbolism).

*Planning Tip:*

Organise ideas into 3-4 main points — these will become your body paragraphs.

### 3. Write a Clear Thesis Statement

Your thesis = your central argument, that is, what you want to demonstrate in your essay.

A good thesis:

- Answers the question directly.
- Offers a clear interpretation.
- Suggests the significance of the author's choices.

*Example of thesis statement:*

In *The Secret River*, Grenville portrays colonisation as a process of moral compromise and cultural erasure, forcing characters to navigate impossible choices in an unfamiliar world.

### 4. Structure Your Essay (TEEL)

Each body paragraph should follow **TEEL**:

| <b>TEEL Breakdown</b> | <b>Explanation</b>   |
|-----------------------|--|
| Topic Sentence        | State your main idea for the paragraph.  |
| Evidence              | Include a well-chosen quote from the text.   |
| Explanation           | Analyse the quote: what is the author showing us? How does it relate to your argument? |
| Linking Sentence      | Connect back to the essay question and prepare for the next point.                     |

## 5. Integrate Textual Evidence

When using a quote:

- Introduce it.
- Embed it smoothly.
- Analyse its meaning.
- Link it back to the author's intention.

*Example:*

Grenville's use of visual imagery in "*the land stretched out like an open palm*" highlights the perceived emptiness of the Australian landscape, framing it as available for taking and underscoring the colonial mindset.

## 6. Write an Effective Introduction

Your introduction should:

- Start with a **hook**.
- Introduce the **text** (title, author, publication date if relevant).
- Present your **thesis**.
- Briefly outline the **main points** you will explore.
- 

*Example:*

The colonisation of Australia was not only a political process but a deeply personal and violent transformation of both land and lives. Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* captures this turbulent moment through the eyes of a settler grappling with his place in an unfamiliar world. Indeed, in her historical novel published in 2005, Kate Grenville examines the devastating impact of British colonisation on both Indigenous Australians and settlers. Through the experiences of her protagonist, William Thornhill, Grenville suggests that colonisation is rooted in violence, misunderstanding, and moral conflict.

## 7. Write a Strong Conclusion

Your conclusion should:

- Restate your **thesis** (using new wording).
- Summarise your **main points**.
- Reflect on the **broader significance** (the author's message about human experience, society, or history).

## 8. Edit and Refine

- Check that every paragraph links back to your thesis.
- Look for formal, clear sentence structures.
- Proofread for grammar, punctuation, and clarity.
- Avoid personal pronouns ("I think", "I believe") unless the task allows.

## Final Checklist

- ✓ Does my introduction clearly state my thesis?
- ✓ Does each paragraph follow TEEL?
- ✓ Have I used evidence and explained it fully?
- ✓ Does my conclusion reflect on the bigger picture?
- ✓ Have I edited for clarity, accuracy, and formal tone?