

The Five-Paragraph Essay

. . . is a great way for beginners to analyze art of all kinds. Writing a five-paragraph essay teaches clear thinking and good writing. It also trains people in the kind of work done by most all professionals in the humanities. The format:

1. Introduction

- a. Motivator: Why you're writing the paper, in very general terms
- b. **Thesis:** The specific idea that you'll argue in the paper
- c. Blueprint: The specific examples you'll use in arguing your thesis

2. Example 1

Here you briefly restate your example from the blueprint. Then you offer evidence from the text or film to demonstrate how this example supports your thesis.

3. Example 2

4. Example 3

5. Conclusion

Here you restate your thesis (in a different way from in the introduction), then end with a clincher--a sentence or two that bring your argument to a satisfying, convincing finish.

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary says a **thesis** is "a position or proposition which a person advances and offers to maintain, or which is actually maintained by argument." It's the heart of your paper; the idea that everything else relates to.

You must have *at least* five paragraphs in an essay (since any fewer than three examples would be too few), but of course you can have more than three examples, and hence more than five total paragraphs.

Each paragraph must contain at least three sentences.

Here's a sample essay.

Music and Characterization in *The Limey*

Unlike creators of text, filmmakers are able to use multiple channels of information--both visual and auditory--to communicate with the audience. In *The Limey*, 1960s pop songs are used to enhance the viewer's understanding of characters' lives, backgrounds and motivations. Three examples of songs used in this way are "The Seeker" by the Who, "King Midas in Reverse" by the Hollies, and "Colours" by Donovan.

The opening guitar riffs of "The Seeker" are, in fact, the first sounds heard by the audience in the film, immediately after Wilson's plea to "tell me about Jenny." That the song is played during the montage in which we first meet Wilson indicates that he *is* the seeker, a man who has "been searching low and high," and who "won't get to

get what I'm after"--the truth about his daughter's death--"Until the day I die." Sixties cultural references such as the Beatles, "Bobby Dylan," and Timothy Leary serve to tie Wilson's character to that era, perhaps the peak of his career and family life. Wilson's peculiar mix of recidivism and charm are alluded to in the subsequent line "As I ransack their homes / They want to shake my hand." Finally, as the song abruptly ends, we simultaneously see Wilson unfold the newspaper clipping about his daughter's death, and hear the lyric "I'm a really desperate man" echo into silence, underscoring the urgency of his search.

The audience's first meeting with Terry Valentine is accompanied by the Hollies' "King Midas in Reverse," which is, as with "The Seeker" and Wilson, a seemingly perfect complement to the slice-of-life montage which introduces the character. Though on the surface Valentine appears to be a wealthy, attractive, successful man with an active romantic life, the song's lyrics call into question the reality behind this veneer of happiness and serenity: "If you could only see me . . . You wouldn't want to be me / Oh, I can assure you of that." We then hear a warning not heeded by Jenny: "I'm not the guy to run with / 'cause I'll throw you off the line / I'll break you and destroy you / Given time." As with "The Seeker," here a song helps the viewer to know immediately how complex the character is, all in a language and style--those of a 60s pop song--which jibe well with the character's life history.

[Third paragraph goes here, in the same format as the last two]

The filmmakers of *The Limey* cleverly use songs to give an added dimension of characterization to the film. In each case, the songs give the audience important new information in an intriguing, natural way--one which feels especially appropriate both for the characters and the storyline. *The Limey* provides a demonstration of how soundtracks can be used creatively to enhance the picture's dramatic impact on the audience--and not, as is so often true, simply to enhance the filmmakers' bottom line.