English Essay: Writing a Body Paragraph

Body Paragraph One

1. Begin with a topic sentence that supports your thesis statement and expresses the main idea of the paragraph.

   Ex. To be sure, Macbeth’s assault on women and children, in an attempt to eliminate all future rivals for the throne, demonstrates some courage.

2. Second, provide a piece of evidence (usually a quotation) from the reading to support the topic sentence. Lead into the quotation by indicating who is speaking and what’s happening.

   Ex. Reflecting upon the prophecy that Banquo’s sons will become kings, Macbeth declares, “Rather than so, come fate into the list, / And champion me to th’utterance” (3.1.76-7).

3. Third, explain how the quotation illustrates the topic sentence. And if you’ve used a longish quotation, re-quote individual words and phrases as you interpret.

   Ex. Instead of accepting fate, that Banquo’s children will inherit the crown, Macbeth boldly resolves to enter the combat arena (“list”) and fight to the death (“th’utterance”) against it.

4. If you can, repeat (2) and (3) above, in order to provide more evidence for the topic sentence.

   Ex. Similarly, Macbeth speaks of the daring it will take to kill Macduff’s wife and children: “No boasting like a fool; / This deed I’ll do before this purpose cool” (4.1.174-5). Macbeth has to act quickly before he loses his intent, implying that the act does require some bravery.

Body Paragraph Two (and Three, and Four, etc.)

1. Begin with a transition from the previous paragraph, and then follow with a topic sentence that supports your thesis statement and expresses the main idea of the paragraph.

   Ex. [Transition:] Despite the degree of courage Macbeth requires to execute his plans, [Topic Sentence:] he is driven primarily by fear of who will succeed him as king.

2. Repeat (2) through (4) above.

   DO document all quotations and paraphrases by including in parentheses page numbers (for novels, short stories, and modern plays), line numbers (for poems), or act/scene/line numbers (for Shakespeare).

   DO quote only key words and phrases rather than long chunks of text.

   DO make sure the body of the paper provides evidence for every claim made in the thesis statement and does not introduce any new claim not made in the thesis statement.

   DON’T provide plot summary. Assume your reader has read the texts and needs to be convinced of your argument, not told the plot.