

Critical Essay Formula

Any critical or argument essay has a purpose: to clearly explain your claims, points, and ideas to the reader in a convincing way. The following chart shows how the different parts of an essay support a central concept or idea. (Check out the outline for this essay as well.)

Keep in mind that this is only a sample essay; always check with your instructor if you have questions about content and organization in your own work.

Title <ul style="list-style-type: none">States what your essay is about in an interesting way	"Overcoming the Odds: Symbols of Freedom in Stephen King's <i>Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption</i> and Frank Darabont's <i>The Shawshank Redemption</i> ."
Section #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><u>General statement that applies to the topic</u>A more specific statement which explains the first statementThe thesis statement-- mentions the name of the specific book/poem/ film/issue, and what you will discuss about it. It states your opinion and the angle you will take.<i>1-2 sentences which explain the main idea in the thesis statement</i>	<p><u>As a theme in film or literature, freedom is often shown through the experiences of a character who has been unjustly enslaved.</u></p> <p>Contrasting the basic human right to freedom with an unfair imprisonment makes a clear distinction between right and wrong, justice and injustice, and humanity and inhumanity. In their different version of <i>Shawshank Redemption</i>, author Stephen King and director Frank Darabont clearly make these distinctions using a bird, a library, and a poster as symbols of freedom and justice. <i>In both film and book, these symbols represent the protagonist's human spirit, longing for community, and ultimate rebirth.</i></p>
Section #2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><u>Transition sentence: leads from the thesis to the first point</u><i>Topic sentence: makes the first point</i>A number of sentences that explain the relevance of this point to the thesis through examples and details.	<p><u>The first important symbol is a bird named Jake, the pet of an inmate at Shawshank prison.</u> <i>Jake represents the struggle of the human spirit of Andy Dufresne, a man who has been wrongly convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.</i> As a bird, Jake can be seen as a universal symbol of freedom. Putting him in an unnatural "cage" of the prison serves as a mirror for Andy's own captured spirit. Andy is compared to a bird who "is not meant to be caged" because "his feathers are too bright" and his "song too sweet and wild" (King 100). In the book, Jake's death shows us the dangers of putting something that is inherently free in a prison of any kind. The film, however, has Jake flying out of a window to freedom, and so gives a more optimistic view of Andy's human spirit. It foreshadows his escape from Shawshank and his ultimate victory over the society that robbed him of his basic right to exist without unfair restrictions.</p>

<p>Section #3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Transition sentence: connects the last section to this section</u> • <i>Topic sentence: makes the second point</i> • A number of sentences that explain the relevance of this point to the thesis through examples and details. 	<p>While the bird represents Andy's desire for freedom outside of Shawshank, the prison library shows us how he creates a kind of personal freedom while he is still a prisoner. <i>The library is a social and intellectual gathering center within the prison walls, and a sign of Andy's longing for a real community.</i> On the outside, Andy was a well-to-do banker. Inside the prison, his moral and intellectual superiority gives him a reputation for being a "snob" and a "cold fish" (27). Eventually, though, Andy succeeds in connecting his idea of community with the prison's communal structure. In developing the library, Andy effectively recreates a piece of his own higher-level society, where the convicts can learn trade skills, listen to music, and get high school diplomas. In some small way, Andy raises the social level of the prisoners to his own by introducing them to "civilized" knowledge, culture, and social usefulness.</p>
<p>Section #4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Transition sentence: connects the last section to this section</u> • <i>Topic sentence: makes the third point</i> • A number of sentences that explain the relevance of this point to the thesis through examples and details. 	<p>The third and most important symbol of freedom in this story is the poster of Rita Hayworth in Andy's cell. <i>Here, a beautiful woman represents everything about life on the outside: sensual pleasures, fulfillment, and most importantly, rebirth to a new life.</i> When Andy says that he would like to "step through the picture to be with the girl," he actually means that he wants to experience freedom again in the form of all the things the woman represents. The secret escape tunnel he creates behind the poster allows Andy to do just that. He must literally go <i>through</i> the woman, crawl <i>through</i> a birth canal-like sewage pipe, and emerge, renewed and reborn, somewhere outside the prison walls. In this way, the woman is Andy's new "mother," the giver of life, freedom, and redemption.</p>
<p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Transition sentence: recaps the main idea of the essay, but in a different way</u> • <i>Several sentences that make conclusions about all of the ideas in the essay, and explain the importance of the thesis to the reader</i> • Concluding sentence that makes a strong statement and leaves the reader with a memorable thought or idea 	<p>Andy Dufresne's story exemplifies the theme of stolen freedom in several important ways. <i>First, Andy's own personal freedom is taken away when he is falsely convicted of murder. Then, Andy "steals" his freedom back by force with a daring escape. The bird, the library, and the poster show us different physical and psychological aspects of this process. Each symbol reveals a facet of Andy and his drive to recover his freedom. In this way, Andy's escape from Shawshank proves the ultimate triumph of the human spirit over injustice and inhumanity.</i></p>

