

Stage 4: The Written Assignment

Take a quick look back at all of the work you have already done with the text you are studying:

1. In addition to classroom exercises and standard discussions, you have also participated in an Interactive Oral and explored the cultural and contextual background of the work.
2. You have written about your own learning experiences and increased understanding in a Reflective Statement.
3. Finally, you have responded to a Supervised Writing prompt that required you to quickly synthesize your knowledge of the text.

The final step in the process is a natural extension of all three of these previous activities: the Written Assignment.

The Written Assignment is a formal essay between 1200 and 1500 words in length that focuses on a literary aspect of the work you are studying. However, you have already done much of the preliminary work for this assignment, because your essay will be based in some way on your response for the Supervised Writing. The first thing you should do before starting your Written Assignment is to look over the rubric that will be used to mark it.

Criterion	What to ask yourself about your own Written Assignment...	Marks Possible
A. Reflective Statement	Did you write about your new or improved understanding of the work that came from the Interactive Oral? Did you directly connect the Interactive Oral to the text and show a change in your view of the work?	3
B. Knowledge and understanding	Have you shown a true understanding of the work from a literary point of view? Have you included appropriate details and/or quotations from the text to support your assertions? Have you offered an insight into the work instead of just re-telling the story?	6

C. Appreciation of the writer's choices	Have you examined the literary devices or techniques used by the author and connected those devices to effects or meanings in the work? Have you shown your appreciation of the way in which the author uses metaphors, symbols, structure, imagery, diction, and other literary devices to achieve a definite purpose in the text?	6
D. Organization and development	Have you organized your writing in a logical and effective way? Have you worked the quotations or relevant details from the text smoothly into your writing? Do your quotations from the text help your argument?	5
E. Language	Have you used formal language, appropriate to this kind of assignment? Do you use the correct literary terms in your discussion? Have you avoided repetition?	5
TOTAL		25

Other hints for the Written Assignment:

1. **Narrow your focus:** if you discussed three characters in your Supervised Writing, perhaps you might narrow your focus on one of those characters for your Written Assignment. Maybe you talked about an author's use of symbolism in a work – now you can narrow your focus to a discussion of that symbol's use in only one part of the work.
2. **Consult your teacher:** even if you feel confident about your topic, you should discuss it with your teacher to make sure that it is suitable and that you will be able to write enough words about it (it may turn out, of course, that your topic is too big for only 1500 words – in that case, your teacher will be able to help you narrow your focus to a suitable range).
3. **Write a first draft:** your teacher cannot mark on the draft itself, but he or she can talk to you about the progress and direction of the paper, or your teacher may choose to give you feedback in written form on a separate sheet of paper. Once you have this feedback, in whatever form it may take, you must complete the final draft of your essay without any further assistance from anyone.

Activity

Go back to a question you created for a Supervised Writing earlier in this section. How could that question be turned into a thesis or the basis for a literary argument in a Written Assignment? (Hint: If you have trouble making this transition, that may mean you need to go back and rethink your initial Supervised Writing question.)

Write out a brief response, making clear just what it is you plan to argue about the work, based on your work with a Supervised Writing prompt.

Detail and effect

One of the most successful strategies in producing a Written Assignment is to explore just *how* the writer creates the impact of a successful piece of literary art. Candidates can do this by precisely citing details and their effects to build the argument.

The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka is a popular work in IB classes and will serve as a good work for exemplifying this strategy. The student in this case has selected the topic: "How Kafka has effectively presented a dramatic tension between the outer and the inner reality of Gregor Samsa in this novella of transformation." As you can see the student



has advantaged herself already by focusing on technique: *how* the two realities, man and insect, are kept in a tension throughout the novella.

For a truly successful essay on this topic, the candidate will want to demonstrate, through detail, the degree to which Kafka has managed to keep the two realities in an intriguing tension for the reader, who is never allowed to settle into either situation: Gregor has simply become a kind of thinking bug, or here is a man who believes himself to be transformed into an insect but continues to think as a man. For a strong essay, the candidate will show not only **details** from the text which support this idea, but will also make a proposal about the **effect** of each detail in maintaining this tension between Gregor portrayed as a man and as an insect.

Activity

Below are four examples of some of the details the student has decided to use to support her argument. In the first case we have given you both the details and the *effect statement* the student has written. See if, for the subsequent three examples, you can write an "effect statement", keeping in mind the line of argument the candidate has decided upon: presenting the tension of inner and outer reality.

"Why didn't his sister join the others? ... Well, why was she crying? ... Because he wouldn't get up and let the chief clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his job, and because the chief would begin dunning his parents again for the old debts?" (p96)

With this set of five rhetorical questions, Kafka has confirmed for us that Gregor is still thinking of himself as a viable wage-earner. We also see that he is capable of moving beyond his own situation of change into the realm of empathy, of thinking about others, something that certainly distinguishes him from an insect. Here Kafka is reinforcing the delicate balance of Gregor the man, Gregor the bug by giving him a moral sense about these issues.

As we first encounter Gregor in the opening paragraph, we meet the revelation that "he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. His back is "armor-plated," he finds he has a "domelike brown belly," and "numerous legs."

What is the effect of these details?

In the evening, Gregor wakes and is drawn to the door into the hall by the smell of food. He discovers "a basin filled with fresh milk ...". He dips his head into it, but finds he cannot eat because his left side is tender, but also because "he did not like the milk either, although milk has been his favorite drink...". He crawls away, "almost with repulsion". (p105)

How might these details be used to advance the argument about the tension between man and bug?

At a later point in the story his sister, Grete, considers whether it is best to leave Gregor's room with its present furniture or if it might be better to remove it to give him more freedom to crawl around. Gregor has a conflicted reaction to this proposal. However he finally decides that "he could not dispense with the good influence of the furniture on his state of mind ... even if the furniture did hamper him in his senseless crawling around and around ...". (p117)

How do these details about a very commonplace reality, furniture, develop some of the conflicts that Gregor is experiencing about his transformation?

This exercise is only a brief sample of an effective way to proceed in constructing a literary argument. Remember that assertions are unconvincing without supporting details, and details are best developed by making a proposal about the effect they have on advancing your argument. Note: You will find some further aids to writing a good essay in Chapter 4 on part 3 of the course.

-- extracts from *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka