

## The five basic questions I use to exercise reading and writing comprehension. These questions can be used for both novels and short stories.

- Q.1 **Identify the novel** according to the following: **Title**, **Author**, **Story category** (fiction/non-fiction) and **type** (science fiction, fairy tale, fantasy, mystery, thriller, romance, biblical, western or a combination of two or more types), **audience** (adult, young adult, pre-teen, child, family, mature), size and structure (pages and chapter number). What person is the story told in? (Examples: First person: the story is told by the central character or protagonist; Third person: the story is told by an unknown narrator).
- Q.2. Describe the principle **protagonist** (main character who represents the lead in the plot), one **antagonist** (main character who opposes the efforts of the protagonist). Both descriptions should include age and gender (approximate age if not known), personality type (example: bright young student with outgoing personality but has weakness of impatience and a tendency to be too outspoken), physical characteristics (if known), role in the plot (examples: adventurer seeking his fortune, amateur detective seeking justice for his friends, super-hero, brave but reluctant hero, the King, the fabled princess, the adorable and clever little schoolgirl, a bright and sensitive young man trapped in a severely handicapped body, etc.).
- Q.3. Prepare a brief **summary** of the plot (one to two pages maximum). Identify the main struggle, conflict or situation that needs resolution (solving, winning, escaping, surviving, conquering, etc.). Show examples of the main turns in the plot (key decision points for the protagonist or sudden events that change all the lives of our main characters, an accident that changed everything, the challenge that created a new pathway, a new direction in life, etc.). If the story is based on true events in history then identify these (Example: the Russian revolution in "War and Peace", the sinking of the Titanic in "Titanic", the Japanese Shogunate of Toranaga (Torkugawa) in "Shogun", etc.). Also, identify the main what, who, where and when of the story (Example: turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-Century English gentry, wild west of the 1860's Arizona, the civil wars of the Chosun Dynasty 500 years ago in Korea, etc.)
- Q.4. What **messages**, **themes**, **symbols** or **lessons** are being dramatized in the story? For example, a theme could be the injustice of racial prejudice and the power of human determination to overcome great adversity (difficulties) or the adventurer must overcome impossible odds and stay calm and focused under great adversity, or the quiet strength of intelligence and determination to overcome persecution, and here is a common one, honesty and kindness always brings greater rewards than greed and dishonesty. Get the picture?
- Q.5. Did you **enjoy the story**? Why or why not. Don't just say "I liked it". Give reasons why you did or didn't. Identify the qualities (ingredients) of the story that you like and/or dislike. Qualities include the **story type**, the **pace** of the story, for example, "Fast paced with short reflections that build to a big fast-action climax". Other qualities include **character development** and how you feel about the main character(s). Is the story **believable**, does it hold together, that is, is it tightly integrated or loosely connected to the main character-plot relationship? What about the **messages** and **attitudes** that the story portrays? Was anything missing from the story? Did the story run on too long? Was the story too detailed or not rich enough in description? So what are the ingredients of the story? Can you list them? Once listed do you give these qualities positive or negative scores? You can even make a two column list of **positive** and **negative** qualities and give **subjective values** to them and produce a final **score**.

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Other helpful notes...

### Types of essays include:

**Definitions** - Can be technical or semi-formal  
**Classifications** (categories) - Identify a topic as being part of some larger group and explain its place there.  
**Description** - Informal to formal, where the focus is a single topic being described.  
**Sequence** (steps of a process) - Showing how

things are done in a step by step fashion.  
**Compare & Contrast** - Take an argument or position on something and compare and contrast with alternatives.  
**Choice** (Preference) - focus is on a choice and supporting that choice.  
**Explanation or persuasion** - more than facts

(teaching and convincing the reader) - similar to choice but emphasizes the "correctness" and preference for an idea.

**Evaluation** (supported opinion or judgement) -

Evaluating the work of others with a clear opinion and support for it.

An essay can have more than one classification. For example an essay could include both evaluation and compare & contrast qualities.

### START WITH AN OUTLINE:

Before writing an essay you should always organize your thoughts using an outline and plan. The outline should identify the type of essay that is being considered and then in point form write out all the ideas, messages, facts and opinions you want to include. Check them for relevancy and then order them for placement in your essay. The next step can be your introduction. Re-read your

introduction to check that it covers only the topic and sets the stage for the body section (content) of the essay. The introduction should be provocative enough to encourage the reader to continue. It should contain the bold statement of opinion or an invitation to the importance of the topic.

*Three essential parts: Introduction, supporting paragraphs (body), summary paragraph.*

A) **Introduction** contains the main topic or thesis or purpose (depends on the type of essay)

B) **Supporting paragraphs** must be restricted to explaining, describing, proving, comparing and contrasting, showing the steps, etc. of your topic or thesis.

C) **Summarize** the essential point or opinion or message that captures the purpose or importance for writing the essay.

### **Grammar and Spelling**

1. Check your spelling.
2. Check your grammar.
3. Read your essay again.
4. Make sure each sentence has a subject.
5. Make sure your subjects and verbs agree with each other.
6. Check the verb tenses of each sentence.
7. Make sure that each sentence makes sense.
8. Make sure your vocabulary is varied and balanced (avoid slang or very informal language)

### **Style and Organization**

1. Make sure your essay has an introduction, supporting paragraphs, and a summary paragraph.
2. Check that you have a thesis statement that identifies the main idea of the essay.
3. Check that all your paragraphs follow the proper paragraph format.
4. See if your essay is interesting.