

**LITCRIT CONCEPTS VOL 3:
ESSAY**

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We are a small company that listens! If you have any questions or if there is an area that you would like fully explored, let us hear from you. We hope you enjoy this product and stay in contact with us throughout your academic journey.

~ President Hexco Inc., Linda Tarrant

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The Number One Rule

The number one rule for writing your UIL Tie Breaker essay is this:

Focus... no, wait... **Focus**... that's not quite it, either... **Focus!**

Turning in a clear, concise, focused essay is the best favor you can do for your essay. Once you turn it in, that essay is on its own. You're not going to be there with it, explaining what you meant by this, or rewording that, or omitting all of those. Once your essay leaves your hands, the only way the judges will know what you wanted to say is for your essay to speak for itself. So, make sure it is very clear. That means avoiding a few land mines.

Wordiness

Avoid being too wordy in your essay because it makes your essay seem confused, which usually means your reader (in this case, a judge) becomes confused. It is very difficult to discern someone's point when there are too many words presenting it. Think about when you are faced with one of those reading comprehension passages. Those are well-written and professional-caliber, but you are always wishing there was that one statement that would just tell you what you really need to know. The same goes for your LitCrit essay. Don't make the judges guess. In fact, you want to make reading your essay as little work as possible.

Another problem with wordiness is that it often looks like an attempt to cover up the lack of a good idea. "If I just keep writing, maybe an idea will form. Or maybe the judges will think I know what I'm talking about because I'm, well, talking so much." If you don't have a good idea for your essay, there are better strategies than generating a lot of smoke. Believe me, you're not fooling anyone, anyway!

The final reason to be careful about wordiness is that you simply do not have the word count for it. With only about 150 words for your entire essay, you can't afford to waste any of them. If you do, your essay will essentially say nothing. It is far better to write a short, concise essay with a clear point of view than to write all 150 words but say nothing.

Need some practice? There's a simple, fun exercise on the next page.

EXERCISE:

Write out a very long sentence. Make it as long as you can, but have a main idea in mind. If you are having trouble thinking of what to say, try one of these prompts:

- Think of a person in your life, and write out something you want that person to know.
- Think of a celebrity, and write about what you think of him or her.
- Describe one of the greatest (or worst) trips you have ever taken, including what made it so great (or so awful).
- What is one of your favorite books? Write a sentence about why you love it, why you think one of the characters is so well-written, what the story was about, or what one of the themes is.
- Reveal your secret desire to be able to do something, and tell why you wish you could do it.
- Explain how you feel about LitCrit and/or the essay portion of the test.

Once you have your sentence, you are going to rewrite it a little shorter. Go for cutting it down by 25%-50%. Then take your shorter sentence, and do it again. Go for cutting another 25%-50% of that sentence. Now, reread your sentence. It should be a lot tighter now. What is the essence of what you want to say? Don't worry about leaving in every funny comment, long word, or moving phrase. Really look for the heart of that sentence, and take one more run at it. Cut as much or as little as you think is necessary to finish with a clear, concise expression.

Example:

First sentence:

When I go off running around the neighborhood with my dogs BooBoo, Rocky, Flopster, Barkley, Casper, and Toto, I just absolutely love the way the morning air helps me wake up, even though the dogs are totally yanking my shoulder out of the socket, and it helps me get ready for the day so much that I keep thinking that I really should take my camera sometime and see if I can capture the morning mood with that, maybe from some different angles, or if I should just pick a theme song that makes me feel like I'm in a movie or something!

Second sentence:

When I go running around the neighborhood with my dogs, I love the way the morning air helps me wake up, even though the dogs are pulling so hard, and I feel like I am ready for the day so much that I wish I could have a picture or a song to go with it so I could hold onto that feeling all day long.

Final sentence:

When I run in the morning, the air helps me wake up and feel ready for the day.

Time Management

Preparing for the essay portion of the test can be a little difficult in terms of planning out your time because you don't know how much time you will have until you get there. Unless you consistently get through the multiple-choice questions in about the same time span, you need to be ready to do a strong essay, whether you have three minutes or thirty minutes.

The more you practice writing tie breaker essays, the better you are going to get to know your own process, how long it takes to do an easy one, how long it takes to do a challenging one, and where you need the most time. Some of you will put more time into the outline, and then the writing goes quickly. Some of you do a quick outline that captures your thoughts and structure, but it takes you longer to get the wording and transitions you want.

For most students in a normal essay, the most difficult parts to write are the introduction and the conclusion. Lucky for you, in UIL LitCrit, you only have 150 words, so your introduction is going to be one sentence – two sentences max. The same goes for the conclusion. If you get hung up on those, even with a short essay like this, be aware that you are going to need more time to distill your thoughts into a few words. It may be, however, that keeping it short takes the pressure off of you. This will be true for writers who know exactly what they want their introductions and conclusions to say, but they have trouble stretching it into an entire paragraph without making it sound repetitive. If that describes you, you just hit the jackpot because you can pop in that brief statement and get moving!

Let me give you a few examples to show you what an introduction and conclusion should look like. Instead of writing, "This poem exemplifies the work of the Metaphysical Poets because it progresses logically, contains themes of love and death, has simple diction, and imagery drawn from the everyday, all of which is exactly what any reader of Donne would expect," you could write, "This poem demonstrates why Donne is the face of Metaphysical Poetry itself." Taking it a step further, you could even write, "Representing the Metaphysicals in the world of poetry, Donne ... (then right into your main idea)." The same strategy applies to the conclusion. The point is that the more you practice keeping those parts of the essay short and sweet, the less time they will take.

Read the following and write a well-developed essay in which you explain how the speaker tries to entice his love by making an argument about time. To strengthen your essay, refer to literary techniques and images, citing specific examples.

"To His Coy Mistress"

by Andrew Marvell

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime
We would sit down and think which way
To walk and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, Lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie

Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust:
The grave 's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapt power. Let
us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.