

Personal Response

(Five Paragraph Essay)

Personal Response to literature depends on the recognition of the theme in the piece of literature you are responding to. Common themes such as risk, isolation, loneliness, or lack of communication really lend themselves to the discussion needed for a good personal response essay. In order to find the theme of the literature that is to be responded to, first examine the narrator's behavior. Question the actions and motivations for the behavior of the literature's main character. For example, if a character acts rudely toward others, the reader must investigate why this behavior happened. Watch for clues as you read a story, think of personal experiences you have had that may be parallel to the narrator's experience. The rude character may be reacting to external pressures, or even out of a need for personal contact.

Once the general theme of the literature has been established, think of a similar situation or feeling that has happened to you. It is at this point that many writers of personal response get bogged down. They believe that personal experience must reflect their own lives. This is not true. Borrow an experience from a friend or make one up. Build this experience around the theme of what you have read. Figuring out the theme of the literature and then linking it to an experience of your own are the first two steps in understanding personal response. The final step is to support your opinion of the author's attitude by bringing in other literature you have studied. This will give your essay a more authoritative tone. Study stories which have dealt with the common themes mentioned above. The easiest method to use when responding personally to literature is an essay form which has been nickname "The Five Paragraph Bullet".

The Five Paragraph Essay

Introduction

Sometimes taking risks is essential in order to achieve one's purpose in life whether this is in the area of public or personal relationships. The narrator in the

The first paragraph of this essay like any essay is an introduction. After making a general statement based on the theme of the literature, develop

excerpt from Lake Wobegone Days risks personal and physical injury to achieve his purpose of impressing his new girlfriend. His philosophy seems to be 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'. Too often in life we are too inhibited by fear of being hurt to risk doing the things which would bring us greatest satisfaction.

The author has formed this conclusion through one dating experience at the age of 16. During this time he first risks physical sickness and personal humiliation by pretending to be a 'seasoned' smoker to impress his girl. "I didn't smoke, but then I was young, I'd been held back, it was time to get started on these things". Secondly, he makes up an imaginary story which is romantic enough to hold his girl friend's interest. Not only this, but he also risks being injured or laughed at by pretending he can ski, "I never had, but how would I know I couldn't unless I tried". (He has never kissed a girl either, but "felt prepared to do either one".) He does try skiing and is not hurt, although his girl is, and once again he is prepared to risk derision by acting as an 'ankle man'. However, he is rewarded by being physically close to, and admired by, his sweetheart.

The theme of taking risks to achieve a purpose is also developed in the short story "A Few Notes for Orpheus" by Don Bailey. Jake, the main character, has cut himself off from both generations of his family because he fears being made into a 'statue', i.e., shaped by others. When he hears his father is dying he must risk re-establishing contact with both his

the paragraph further by outlining the author's attitude and then develop a thesis centered around your opinion of what you have read. Do you agree with the author's ideas on his subject or are you finding yourself in disagreement? It is this thesis that you will attempt to prove in the following paragraphs.

This paragraph starts with a very specific statement concerning how the author has formed his attitude. This paragraph analyzes the literature you have just read to determine how the author developed his opinion.

Paragraph two again begins very specifically by pulling in other literature you have studied with a common theme. This literature must have a similar idea or attitude to the literature you are responding to.

daughter and his parents. He takes this emotional risk, but also has to face physical danger to rescue his drowning daughter. The achievement for Jake is a much closer relationship with his daughter and father and a realisation that communication is a mutual responsibility.

Personally, I found I had to take many risks to achieve my purpose of learning French, including the risk of humiliation. There is no way to avoid taking risks and making errors if you are learning another language. I learned that embarrassed silence after a perfectly (to me) harmless remark, meant that I had committed some major 'faux-pas'! However, I did learn to communicate fairly well and met many French people. I am glad that, like the narrator, I had the courage to risk humiliation in order to achieve a satisfying purpose.

In conclusion, in fact or fiction, it is often essential to risk humiliation or danger to achieve a desired goal. In Lake Wobegone Days the author risks being ridiculed, if not injured, but he does impress his girl. Jake in 'A Few Notes for Orpheus' risks rejection, but achieves closeness. Personally, I have risked laughter, but learned a language. I agree with this author's attitude that risk-taking is often essential to achievement, or in the current fitness phrase, "No pain, no gain"!

Paragraph three of the body of the essay boldly starts by stating your opinion of what has happened in the story. It also must relate what circumstances formed your attitude. This is where you give your experience and observation. Wrap up this paragraph by directly referring to the thesis statement in the first paragraph.

This is a summary of the conclusions you have come to in your essay. Restate these points, along with rewording the original thesis statement.