



THE LITERARY ESSAY EXAM

HOW TO WRITE A SHORT ANSWER ESSAY – ANSWER KEY

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Literature Classes: ENG 2413, ENG 2433, and ENG 2543



Objectives

Objectives

- Given the sample question and answer and grading rubric, the learner will be able to identify one missing and one completed requirement for 20 points.
- Given the sample answer and a guide to MLA-style documentation, the learner will be able to correct errors in MLA documentation for 10 points.
- Given the sample answer and a guide to essay writing basics, the learner will be able to correct errors in grammar, style, and structure for 20 points.



Results

Expected results

Learners will improve their responses by analyzing a sample question & answer for:

- Correct MLA-style documentation of sources;
- Accepted essay writing standards of the class;
- Completeness of response to the question.



Sample Question

- The narrator in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” claims he is not insane. Do you agree or disagree with his self-assessment? Support your answer by analyzing the narrator’s actions and words, using examples of each in your response.
- **What are the key actions you must take in answering this question?**



Sample Question - KEY

- The narrator in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" claims he is not insane. Do you **agree** or **disagree** with his self-assessment? Support your answer by **analyzing** the narrator's actions and words, **using** examples of each in your response.
- **What are the key actions you must take in answering this question? Answering, analyzing, and using.**



Sample Answer – Pt. 1

In Edgar Allan Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart, the mad narrator explains in detail how he whacks the old man, who screams as he dies. The police show up because a neighbor calls them and the madman gives them a tour of the house, ending up in the bedroom, where the man has been buried under the bed. The narrator hears the old man's heart beating loudly, and he is driven to confess the murder.

□ How does this passage answer the question?



Sample Answer – KEY

- **How does this passage answer the question?**
- **It does not answer the question. Instead, this first part is simply a summary of the short story.**



Sample Answer – KEY

□ Why is this a weakness of the answer?



Sample Answer – KEY

- **Why is this a weakness of the answer?**
- **The question did not ask for summary, and unless specifically required, summary is usually unnecessary. The writer should assume the reader is familiar with the story.**



Sample Answer – KEY

In Edgar Allan Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart, the mad narrator explains in detail how he whacks the old man, who screams as he dies.

□ Evaluate this passage for grammar and MLA style.



Sample Answer – KEY

In Edgar Allan Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart, the mad narrator explains in detail how he whacks the old man, who screams as he dies.

□ **Format of short story title is incorrect.**



Sample Answer – KEY

In Edgar Allan Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart, the mad narrator explains in detail how he **whacks** the old man, who screams as he dies.

- Format of short story title is incorrect.
- Use of “whacks” is informal.



Sample Answer – KEY

In Edgar Allan Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart, the mad narrator explains in detail how he whacks the old man, who screams as he dies.

- Format of short story title is incorrect.
- Use of “whacks” is informal.
- Good signal-in



Sample Answer – KEY

The police show up because a neighbor calls them and the madman gives them a tour of the house, ending up in the bedroom, where the man has been buried under the bed.

□ Evaluate this passage for grammar and MLA style.



Sample Answer – KEY

The police show up because a neighbor calls them and the madman gives them a tour of the house, ending up in the bedroom, where the man has been buried under the bed.

□ Sentence is wordy.



Sample Answer – KEY

The police show up because a neighbor calls **them and** the madman gives them a tour of the house, ending up in the bedroom, where the man has been buried under the bed.

- **Sentence is wordy.**
- **Run-on error.**



Sample Answer – KEY

The police show up because a neighbor calls them and the madman gives them a tour of the house, ending up in the bedroom, where the man **has been buried** under the bed.

- **Sentence is wordy.**
- **Run-on error.**
- **Passive Voice use.**



Sample Answer – KEY

The police show up because a neighbor calls them and the madman gives them a tour of the house, ending up in the bedroom, where the man has been buried under the bed??.

- Sentence is wordy.
- Run-on error.
- Passive Voice use.
- No signal-out.



Sample Answer – KEY

The narrator hears the old man's heart beating loudly, and he is driven to confess the murder.

□ Evaluate this passage for grammar and MLA style.



Sample Answer – KEY

The narrator hears the old man's heart beating loudly, and he **is driven** to confess the murder.

□ **Passive Voice use.**



Sample Answer – KEY

The narrator hears the old man's heart beating loudly, and he is driven to confess the murder??.

- Passive Voice use.
- No signal-out.



Sample Answer – Suggested Revision

Revised: In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," the mad narrator explains in detail how he kills the old man, who screams as he dies (245). After being alerted by a neighbor, the police arrive, and the madman gives them a tour through the house, finally halting in the old man's bedroom, where he has buried the man beneath the floor planks under the bed (246-47). As he is talking, the narrator hears what he thinks is the old man's heart beating loudly, and he confesses the murder (247).

Original: In Edgar Allan Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart, the mad narrator explains in detail how he whacks the old man, who screams as he dies. The police show up because a neighbor calls them and the madman gives them a tour of the house, ending up in the bedroom, where the man has been buried under the bed. The narrator hears the old man's heart beating loudly, and he is driven to confess the murder.



Sample Answer – Pt. 2

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth." He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247). Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart is nuttier than a fruit cake.



Sample Answer – KEY

□ How does this passage answer the question?



Sample Answer – KEY

It answers the question of sanity.

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and **lies about his sanity**. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth." He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247).

Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). Dead hearts do not beat, **nor do sane people** confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart **is nuttier than a fruit cake.**



Sample Answer – KEY

It provides examples of the narrator's words and actions to support that action.

Though the narrator **claims he is not mad**, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "**all things in the heaven and in the earth.**" He also **tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247).** Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then **confess without prompting.** Finally, the madman is so **plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247).** Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their consciences with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart is nuttier than a fruit cake.



Sample Answer – KEY

It provides examples of the narrator's words and actions to support that action.

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, **the reader realizes that he unreliable and lies about his sanity.** For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth." He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247). **Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting.** Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). **Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects.** All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart is nuttier than a fruit cake.



Sample Answer – KEY

□ Evaluate this passage for grammar and MLA style.



Sample Answer – KEY

Grammar and MLA

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth."



Sample Answer – KEY

Grammar and MLA

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth." ??

□ No signal out – Technical Plagiarism



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth."

- No signal out – Technical Plagiarism
- Good integration of quotation with writer's text.



Sample Answer – KEY

Grammar and MLA

He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247).



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

He also tells a **completely untrue lie** to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247).

□ “**Completely untrue lie**” is redundant and wordy.



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the **shreak** they hear occurs in his dream (247).

- “Completely untrue lie” is redundant and wordy.
- Shreak is misspelled.



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

He also tells a completely untrue lie to the police when he tells them that the shreak they hear occurs in his dream (247).

- “Completely untrue lie” is redundant and wordy.
- Shreak is misspelled.
- MLA is correct.



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

Though sane people lie, most **don't** meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247).

□ **It is better to spell out contractions in a short answer: don't = do not**



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so **plagued** with guilt that he hears his own **conscioous** in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247).

□ **Plagued and conscience are misspelled**



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

Though sane people lie, most don't meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscious in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247).

□ **Correct signal-out**



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart is nuttier than a fruit cake.

□ Evaluate this passage for grammar and MLA style.



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their **conscious's** with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart is nuttier than a fruit cake.

- **Consciencences is misspelled**



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart is nuttier than a fruit cake.

- **MLA format of title is incorrect.**



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart is **nuttier than a fruit cake**.

□ Phrase “nuttier than a fruit cake” is too informal for a college-level essay exam.



Sample Answer – KEY Grammar and MLA

Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their conscious's with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart is nuttier than a fruit cake.

□ Good use of signal-in at the end of the answer to wrap it up.



Sample Answer – Suggested Revision

Revised: Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart," takes readers into the mind of the narrator as he plans then executes the murder of his employer. Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth". Sane people cannot. He also lies to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247). Though sane people do lie, most do not meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscience in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their consciences with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is insane.

Original: Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart," takes readers into the mind of the narrator as he plans then executes the murder of his employer. Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that he is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth". Sane people cannot. He also lies to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream (247). Though sane people do lie, most do not meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscience in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly (247). Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their consciences with the sounds of external objects. All of these reasons prove that the narrator in Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is insane.



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Evaluate the accuracy and completeness of this work cited entry.



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Title of page correct



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Author name is correct.



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Title of story is correctly formatted.



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing:



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” ?? p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title, editors



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” ?? p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title, editors, place of publication



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” ?? p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title, editors, place of publication, publishers



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” ?? p. 245-47.

- Information from anthology where story comes from is missing: title, editors, publishers, place of publication, and date.



Sample Answer – Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” p. 245-47.

- Page numbers are correct, but formatting is not.



Sample Answer – Corrected Work Cited

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Anthology of American Short Stories. Ed. Allison Smith and Dave Weston. 4th ed. New York: Macmillan, 2007. 245-47.

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan.
“The Tell-Tale
Heart.” p. 245-47.



Questions/Discussions

- Where do you feel confident in your ability to write a short answer essay?
 - Discussion
- Where do you still feel weak?
 - Discussion
- Other questions?
 - Discussion



Exam

- At the end of the next meeting, I will turn back your graded responses with suggestions and comments.
- You will receive the official take home exam assignment with your choice of questions.
- You will have one week to complete the exam.
- If you still feel confused about how to answer short essay exam questions, you will have opportunities to ask questions in class or you can schedule an appointment to see me privately. My office hours schedule is in your syllabus. You may also email me.