

Thesis and Motive Checklist:

Ask the following questions:

Thesis and Motive

- Is there *one* claim that effectively controls the essay?
- Is the claim debatable?
- Does the claim demonstrate real though? Does it truly illuminate the text and topic?
- Does the writer *show* us that (and why) the thesis is new and worthwhile by suggesting an actual or potential alternative view?

Structure

BEGINNING / INTRODUCTION

- Does the introduction provide readers all - and only - the information they need about the author, text, context and topic?
- Does the introduction imply a clear, substantive, debatable but plausible thesis? Is it clear which claim is the thesis?
- Does every sentence either help to articulate the thesis and motive or to provide essential information?

MIDDLE / BODY

- Does each paragraph clearly state one debatable claim? Does everything in the paragraph directly relate to, and help support and develop, that claim?
- Is each of those claims clearly related to (but different from) the thesis?
- Are the claims logically ordered?
- Is that logic clear? Is each claim clearly linked to those that come before and after? Are any logical “leaps” that readers might have trouble following?
- Does each claim / paragraph clearly build on the last one? Does the argument move forward, or does it seem more like a list or a tour through a museum of interesting but unrelated observations?
- Do any key claims or logical steps in the argument seem to be missing?

ENDING / CONCLUSION

- Does the conclusion give readers the sense that they've gotten somewhere and that the journey has been worthwhile?
- Does it indicate the implications of the argument, consider relevant evaluative questions, or discuss questions that remain unanswered?

Evidence

- Is there ample, appropriate evidence for each claim?
- Are the appropriateness and significance of each fact - its relevance to the claim - perfectly clear?
- Are there any weak examples or inferences that aren't reasonable? Are there moments when readers might reasonably ask, “But couldn't that fact instead mean this?”
- Are all the relevant facts considered? What about facts that might complicate or contradict any of the claims? Are there moments when readers might reasonably think, “But what about X?”
- Is each piece of evidence clearly presented? Do readers have all the contextual information they need to understand a quotation, for example?
- Is each piece of evidence gracefully presented? Are quotations varied by length and presentation? Are they ever too long? Are there any unnecessary block quotations, or block quotations that require additional analysis?

- Are there any unnecessary quotations - instances when the writer should instead simply paraphrase, summarize or describe?

Tone

- Does the writer establish and maintain an effective tone - do any moments in, or aspects of, the essay make its writer seem anything other than serious, credible, engaged and engaging? respectful toward the text(s) and a range of readers?
- Does the writer correctly and consistently use literary terminology?
- Does the writer ever assume too much or too little readerly knowledge or interest?