

HOW TO WRITE A COMPETENT PAPER—A GENERIC GUIDE THAT WILL ALWAYS WORK

People who write for a living all have heard the old quote: “Writing is easy. You just get a blank piece of paper and bleed all over it.” So, if you feel uncomfortable about writing, you’re not alone.

There are two keys to competent writing:

- A. Organization and planning
- B. Rewriting and editing

STEP 1. Examine the story or subject and create a list of potential topics (We are using, as examples, a comparison between “INDAFF, by Fay Weldon, and “Araby,” by James Joyce).

<i>true love</i>	<i>lack of balance</i>
<i>recognition</i>	<i>“reality” intrudes</i>
<i>obsession</i>	<i>puppy love</i>
<i>exotic cities and places</i>	<i>in love with love</i>
<i>epiphany</i>	<i>mistaking lust or infatuation for love</i>
<i>clues</i>	<i>mystique of romance</i>
<i>delusion</i>	<i>self hypnosis</i>
<i>snap judgment</i>	<i>adoration</i>
<i>false notions</i>	

STEP 2. Edit the list—rewrite it. Play with it. Try things in different order. Add and sub-

<i>recognition</i>	<i>lack of balance</i>
<i>epiphany</i>	<i>“reality” intrudes</i>
<i>obsession</i>	<i>adoration</i>
<i>clues</i>	<i>puppy love</i>
<i>delusion</i>	<i>in love with love</i>
<i>false notions</i>	<i>mystique of romance</i>
<i>mistaking lust or infatuation for love</i>	<i>self hypnosis</i>
<i>insight</i>	

STEP 3. See if you can compose a THESIS STATEMENT from your list. (What is a thesis statement? It’s a value judgement summarizing your whole composition which will need to be supported by proof or illustration). It’s usually the first sentence in your composition, but the author of our sample paper chose to make it a two-sentence thesis. She decided that the key to her whole composition was the word on her list, “recognition.” So she wrote:

What some believe to be undying love or an all-consuming passion can sometimes dissipate in just an instant of recognition. The main characters in “Araby” and “INDAFF or Out of Love in Sarajevo” each are transformed by this sudden recognition, known as an “epiphany”—a sudden realization or insight.

STEP 4. From your list, turn key topics into topic sentences that support your thesis statement. A topic sentence is the first sentence of each paragraph, a kind of mini-thesis that summarizes each supporting paragraph.

<i>insight</i>	<i>transformation</i>
<i>recognition</i>	<i>“reality” intrudes</i>
<i>obsession</i>	<i>change of outlook</i>
<i>exotic cities and places</i>	<i>in love with love</i>
<i>epiphany</i>	<i>mistaking lust or infatuation for love</i>
<i>clues</i>	<i>mystique of romance</i>
<i>delusion</i>	<i>fantasies</i>
<i>snap judgment</i>	<i>self hypnosis</i>
<i>false notions</i>	<i>adoration</i>
<i>lack of balance</i>	<i>erotic sensation vs. true love</i>

Thesis Statement: *What some believe to be undying love or an all-consuming passion can sometimes dissipate in just an instant of recognition. The main characters in “Araby” and “Out of Love in Sarajevo” each are transformed by this sudden recognition, known as an “epiphany”—a sudden realization or insight.*

Topic Sentence #1: Weldon provides the reader with many **clues** into the exact nature of the relationship between professor and doctoral student/lover in “Out of Love in Sarajevo,” while the main character herself seems **delusional**.

Topic Sentence #2: Her responses to Peter are **out of balance** with his lack of consideration for her. He even holds her responsible for his wife’s discomfort.

Topic Sentence #3: She becomes conditioned to interpreting her “piercing pains in the heart” as an **“erotic sensation,”** and as the required concrete proof of her inordinate affection for Peter.

Topic Sentence #4: In an instant, that disturbance in her gut has **changed her outlook**.

Topic Sentence #5: The main character in “Araby” was transformed during his first encounter into the world of romance.

Topic Sentence #6: Swept up in his fantasies about the exotic sounding bazaar, he repeats the name over and over again as if it were a mantra, and he were self- hypnotized.

STEP 5. Edit the topic sentence outline—rewrite it. Play with it. Try things in different order. Add and subtract.

STEP 6. Fill in the paragraphs—use the rest of your list to provide details to explain your topic sentences (which, in turn, explain or prove or illustrate your thesis!) Use quotes to add authenticity to your paragraphs. DON’T rely on your memory or your interpretation of what might have happened. Use quotes. Use quotes. Use quotes. Use quotes. Use quotes. Use quotes. Use quotes. Use quotes. Use quotes. Use quotes.

STEP 7. END IT! Either rewrite the thesis in different words or (you guessed it) use a quote, as the author here does.

Kim Lancaster
Short-story Exam
Take-home assignment on Terms and Transformation
ENG102 T,Th 9:30 A.M.
Assignment Due: 2/22/01
Passed In: 2/22/01

Transformation through Epiphany

What some believe to be undying love or an all-consuming passion can sometimes dissipate in just an instant of recognition. The main characters in “Araby” and “Out of Love in Sarajevo” each are transformed by this sudden recognition, known as an “epiphany”—a sudden realization or insight. They are finally aware of the true natures of the *objects* of their obsessions, and move beyond their falsely held notions.

Weldon provides the reader with many clues into the exact nature of the relationship between professor and doctoral student/lover in “Out of Love in Sarajevo,” while the main character herself seems delusional. She believes, in spite of the evidence to the contrary, that this relationship is the *real thing*.

Her responses to Peter are out of balance with his lack of consideration for her. He even holds her responsible for his wife’s discomfort. When they do interact, it’s in long philosophical discussions - his part being the matters of the intellect and hers those of the heart. At the end of these ramblings, the only release from the frustration she feels is found in the endorphins produced during sex.

She becomes conditioned to interpreting her “piercing pains in the heart” as an “erotic sensation”, and as the required concrete proof of her inordinate affection for Peter. When she unexpectedly responds to the young waiter’s smile with a different, but equally powerful feeling, she realizes the possibility of her mistaken perception. It’s the dawning of her transformation:

I smiled back, and instead of the pain in the heart I’d become accustomed to as an erotic sensation, now felt, quite violently, an associated yet different pang which got my lower stomach. The true, the real pain of Ind Aff?.

In an instant, that disturbance in her gut has changed her outlook. Just as the

physical response to Peter had been what cemented their relationship, this unexpected physical reaction to a stranger was what demolished it. Peter, sensing a shift in her, questions what she is thinking. Out of habit, she replies with the usual assurance of her love, but immediately catches herself in the lie, and in all the preceding lies. She is now fully transformed - finally conscious of the reality of the situation and her feelings, and free of the delusions which had bound her in her Ind Aff for Peter. She is awake, aware, and alive with possibilities, and recognizes that Peter is not one of them.

The main character in "Araby" was transformed during his first encounter into the world of romance. Although Mangan's sister was the indirect object of his adoration, it appears he is a captive on the hormonal roller-coaster of puberty, and is in love with being in love—swept up in the mystique of romance. He alternates between rough play with his friends in the alleys and streets near their homes, and staring wistfully at Mangan's door, hoping to get a glimpse of his sister's "brown-clad figure cast by my imagination". At times he would be surprised to realize that his eyes were suddenly full of tears, without reason, and would sometimes be overcome when "a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom".

Swept up in his fantasies about the exotic sounding bazaar, he repeats the name over and over again as if it were a mantra, and he were self-hypnotized. His illusions of his relationship with the girl, and of the romantic bazaar dissolve when he arrives at the deserted, half-dark, very common looking fair. The trance has been broken - he says, "I recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service." As the magic feelings faded, he tried to remember the importance of his mission. He could not—his illusion of love, and of his romantic quest, are replaced by the indignation and embarrassment he now feels:

I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the
light was out. The upper part of the hall was now com-
pletely dark. Gazing into the darkness
I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by van-