

Homeschool High School

Language Arts:

A Guide for Parents

Chris Pepple

©2018

Advice from a homeschooling Mom,  
English major, and writing tutor

## **How do you know what books to read and how many to read each year?**

Well, honestly that depends upon your student. Some students struggle with reading books quickly. That's not necessarily going to change. What you are trying to do in high school is make sure that each student fully understands what they are reading and reads a variety of works.

It is important to read a wide variety of literature: past and present authors, classic and current novels. Some classics are key to read because they are referenced so often in other historical or literary material.

It's fine to divide books into categories if you choose to, but it's not necessary. You can read British lit one year, American lit one year, and world lit one year to tie in to your history courses. You can read books based on genre: poetry, historical fiction, nonfiction, short stories, plays, science fiction, Gothic literature (ex: Frankenstein), etc. You can also just mix it up a bit. As long as your student is reading, you can set the order of the literature that works with your other curriculum.

Here's a listing of common books read. Your high school student needs to read a minimum of five novels, plays, or nonfiction literary books per year. For my classes, I have assigned up to ten a year. I'll start this section with a list I used for one academic year for my last class (giving about two to three weeks to read each book):

Mythology (Edith Hamilton) —introduction and choose one chapter only to read

Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare)

Old Man and the Sea (Hemingway)

A Wrinkle in Time (L'Engle)

The Hound of the Baskervilles (Arthur Conan Doyle)

Frankenstein (Shelley)

The Time Machine (Welles)

A Separate Peace (Knowles)

Poetry by Shel Silverstein and Emily Dickinson

Into Thin Air (Krakauer)

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them (Rowling)

(Screenplay)

I chose this list because it has one nonfiction book that is written as a story; one book that's easy reading (Wrinkle in Time) but has great themes to talk about; poetry; and a couple of plays. We read these and choose one to write a term paper on. For all of these books, we listed (and talked about) characters, setting, plot, and themes. We wrote

something short about each book also (just a couple of paragraphs), alternating between topics such as character development (how did the main characters change/grow) and themes (you can Google the title and find themes or use your libraries online reference tools to find articles to check and see if you found the correct themes).

Here's a few more suggestions. Please find a description of each book to make sure that it fits your family's needs. Some books may contain themes that you are not comfortable introducing to your younger student. These are general fiction books often used in both public and private schools.

- To Kill a Mockingbird/Harper Lee
- The Great Gatsby /F. Scott Fitzgerald
- Animal Farm/ George Orwell.
- Lord of the Flies/William Golding.
- Romeo and Juliet /Shakespeare (or any of his plays)
- The Catcher in the Rye /J. D. Salinger
- Fahrenheit 451 /Ray Bradbury
- The Scarlet Letter/Hawthorne
- Of Mice and Men/Steinbeck
- Jane Eyre/Charlotte Bronte
- Macbeth/Shakespeare
- Flowers for Algernon/Keyes
- Pride and Prejudice/Jane Austen
- Brave New World/Huxley
- The Grapes of Wrath/Steinbeck
- The Crucible/Arthur Miller
- Wuthering Heights/Emily Bronte
- The Count of Monte Cristo/Dumas
- A Separate Peace/Knowles

- Crime and Punishment/Dostoyevsky
- The Diary of a Young Girl/Frank
- The Call of the Wild/London
- The Awakening/Chopin
- The Bell Jar/Plath
- The Perks of Being a Wallflower/Chbosky
- Heart of Darkness/Conrad
- The Three Musketeers/Dumas
- Their Eyes Were Watching God/Hurston
- Little Women/Alcott
- Night/Wiesel
- Watership Down/Adams
- The Giver/Lowry
- The Outsiders/Hinton
- One Hundred Years of Solitude/Marquez
- The Red Badge of Courage/Crane
- Catch-22/Heller
- The Pearl/Steinbeck
- The Jungle/Sinclair
- The House of Mango Street/Cisneros
- Invisible Man/Ellison
- The Alchemist/Coelho
- The Bluest Eye/Morrison
- 22. *The Book Thief* /Markus Zusak
- 23. *The Kite Runner* / Khaled Hosseini
- 24. *A Clockwork Orange*/Anthony Burgess
- 25. *A Passage to India* / EM Forster

## On Writing

Here's my advice on writing: make sure your student writes at least one full term paper per year in high school on any subject. They can write on a historical or literary topic of their choice. Writing is essential for all college classes. Include a bibliography and check the notes taken from research as part of the grade. In their senior year, have them write one literature paper and one paper on current events in history/world events to make sure they know how to use current journals found online (usually free through your library's online reference section).

High school is a time to learn to write well first, then learn to write faster so you can juggle multiple college papers at once without spending hours and hours on each one. That's why my writing book that I wrote (*Find the Right Words: Writing Prompts and Challenges for All Ages* by Chris Pepple, published 2016) gives students some tips on how to improve their writing for their academic courses and includes some very silly writing assignments that don't seem to have a purpose. My goal, however, is to teach students to get their thoughts down quickly, then edit the writing to have a great paper.

## ***Writing an Academic Paper***

### **Basics to know about an academic/term paper:**

- Impersonal as far as you are concerned—no room for your opinion unless you are given specific instructions otherwise
- Based on facts—needs supporting information (historical information, scientific data, research)
- Also based on an interpretation of the facts by professionals in the field (art or literary critics, professional historians, scientists, researchers, other professionals in the field, or direct witnesses to an event—first person accounts)
- Don't assume the reader knows anything about your topic. Write as if you have to tell the reader details so she will understand who and what you are talking about.
- This paper needs to be on average five typed pages with in-paper citations (plus a bibliography) with a minimum of five sources.

## **Organization:**

- I.       Introductory paragraph
  - a.    General information to introduce your topic
  - b.    Start broad, then narrow your topic
  - c.    End with strong, specific thesis statement
- II.      First point/argument/topic
  - a.    Keep one idea to a paragraph
  - b.    A point can have more than one paragraph if needed
  - c.    The topic sentence lets reader know which direction the paragraph is moving
  - d.    Coherence is key—stick to the idea and transition when moving to a new thought
- III.     Second point/argument
  - a.    New topic sentence that connects you with previous point but moves you to new idea
  - b.    Try to have at least four strong sentences per paragraph
- IV.     Third point/argument
- V.      Conclusion
  - a.    Start specific and move out to a broad ending (reverse of intro paragraph)
  - b.    End with strong conclusive thoughts that show you have proven your point



### **Paper topics:**

Paper topics will vary depending on your class and teachers. However, there are some key points you need to remember about each topic you choose:

- I. Make the topic far enough in the past to be able to find resources. For example, if you were to try to write about Alexandra (Aly) Raisman at the end of the 2016 Olympics, you could find a lot of information about her 2016 events, but probably not enough information to write a five-page paper with several in-depth paragraphs. You would have trouble finding books as a source. It would be the same with a current young singer or blogger.
- II. Be broad enough in your topic to find resources. For example, if you are talking about airplanes used during WWII, you may not find enough information if you are only talking about one specific type of plane. You may need to talk about aviation in general during the war. If you can find resources, you can be as specific as you would like to, but make sure the information is available before you commit to a topic.
- III. Choose something among the available topics that interest you enough to research. For example, if you have to write about WWII, you may be able to choose from a variety of topics: weapons used, aviation, nurses, medical units, leaders, naval maneuvers, animal trainers, food

supplies, etc. If you hate reading about battles, try not to choose a topic such as weaponry. Choose food supplies or civilian lifestyle changes. You may be able to choose a topic such as uniform designs and reasoning behind the designs. If you love the battle strategies, don't choose nursing units if you have an option. If you are a writer, check into researching the reporters that covered the war. Find a topic that will come close to holding your interest. The assignment can be hard enough without choosing a topic you strongly dislike reading about.

**Sources:**

For most papers, you will need a minimum of five sources—three books and a magazine/journal and an online site.

Options:

- Books
- Newspapers
- Academic or trade journals
- Government documents
- Pamphlets produced by reputable sources
- Television or radio broadcasts
- Reputable/professional websites (not Wikipedia)
- Blogs by professionals only
- Audio files from interviews
- Minutes from public meetings that discuss your topic (only if verified as accurate)

## Citation examples (MLA):

### Within the paper:

The MLA format follows the author/page method of in-text citation. You don't have to add other information directly in the text. Additional information can be saved for the bibliography. The author's last name and the page number(s) from which the quotation or paraphrase is found must appear in the text, and a complete reference should appear on your Works Cited or Bibliography page. The author's name may appear either in the sentence itself if you mention the name in the context of the sentence, or in parentheses following the quotation or paraphrase, but the page number(s) should always appear in the parentheses and the end of your sentence. For example:

Pepple stated that modern poetry can be defined by a "sharing of voices" (13).

Modern poetry is characterized by the "sharing of voices" (Pepple 13).

Pepple extensively explored the role of personal journeys in the creative process (13).

When a source doesn't have a known author, you should use a shortened title to identify the work to replace the author name. You may also have to add additional information if the same author wrote two books you are using. Your in-text citation should clearly reflect which book from the works cited list you are referring to.

## Works Cited page:

In your citation, these elements should be listed in the following order:

1. Author.
2. Title of source.
3. Title of container,
4. Other contributors,
5. Version,
6. Number,
7. Publisher,
8. Publication date,
9. Location.

The correct punctuation mark that flows each piece of information is shown above here.

Examples:

### ***Book:***

Jones, Paul W. *Culture and Poetry*. Knopf, 1994.

Lincoln, Sharon, and Debra People. *Ancient Poetry for Contemporary Students*. 3rd ed., Pearson, 2014.

### ***A website should be in italics:***

Patterson, Susan. "How to Make Beet Stew." *eCooking*, [www.ecooking.com/how\\_16394\\_make-beet-stew.html](http://www.ecooking.com/how_16394_make-beet-stew.html).

On your Works Cited page, these will be listed in alphabetical order.

Thesis statement:

- Tells the reader what you are writing about in one specific sentence.
- It's a map for the rest of the paper
- It tells us how you are going to interpret or offer a way to understand your subject.
- A single sentence near the beginning of the paper that presents your argument to the reader.

Types:

- Analytical—you are breaking down your subject and evaluating it
- Expository/explanatory—you are explaining something to your readers
- Argumentative—you are making a claim about your subject and justifying this claim through evidence found in research

## Writing a Literature Paper

When you are writing a literature paper, you are creating a thesis statement that offers insight into one aspect of the book. Your paper uses literary criticism to back up that thesis. Every aspect of the paper must relate back to the thesis.

Thesis statements can revolve around:

1. The characters in a work (are they fictional? historical? symbolic of someone or something?) and how those characters develop
2. The religious or political symbolism in a book (is someone symbolic of a religious figure or is a religious thought being portrayed through fiction?)
3. Significant imagery in a work (are animals, plants or other aspects of the natural world used to create a certain emotion or support a thought?)
4. One of the themes in a book and how that theme unfolds (the topic of the importance of education or the topic of racism or treatment of women or love or death)
5. The social context the book was written in and how that social context influenced the author (was it written during a war or during a time of conflict?)
6. The economic factors of a book (what is the author saying about poverty or wealth?)

In the introduction, always give the title and author of your work. Get right to the point of your thesis quickly. Let readers know what directions you are going in with the paper—what characters or images or themes you are

exploring. Typically, the thesis statement falls at the end of your introductory paragraph.

## **What Does it Take to Write Your Way to College?**

### How to Organize an Admissions/Scholarship Essay

1. Have some ***sample paragraphs*** ready that you can cut and paste (or easily edit) for various applications. Colleges will ask you a variety of questions depending upon the university. For scholarships, each application will require different answers depending upon the organization granting the scholarship. Some scholarships are based on academics, faith, volunteer experience, etc. Some topics you must be prepared to write about:
  - a. Your school/homeschool experience
    - i. How did it prepare you for your future?
    - ii. What life lessons can you carry forward?
  - b. Your faith experiences
    - i. Summarize your religious experience. (Did you go to church growing up? Do you attend weekly? Do you go as a family?)
    - ii. How has your faith grown through the years?
    - iii. How will you live out your faith during your college years?

- c. Your volunteer experiences (church, community, scouts, etc.). You have probably volunteered in more places than you realize. Did you help out at VBS? Help organize a car wash? Play the piano for free at a community event? Help a volunteer coach with younger players?
  - d. Your experiences centered around your career goals
    - i. Have you had an internship related to the field you are hoping to major in?
    - ii. Have you taken specific classes that led you to your career decisions/college major?
    - iii. Have you had a mentor that guided you as you chose a possible major?
  - e. Extracurricular activities (band, scouts, sports, art camps, choir, yearbook staff, horseback riding, writing, book clubs, etc.).
  - f. What are your career goals?
  - g. How will this scholarship help you? Be prepared to talk about your family's financial needs.
- 2.** Read the questions/applications and only give answers for what you are being asked. No matter how good you think your essay sounds, if it does not specifically answer the question and stick to the topic at hand, your readers will not move your application forward.



3. Proofread/edit everything you send in. Have someone else read through it if possible.
4. Know where to look for scholarships (never pay for this information).
  - a. Start with the school you are applying for (the Financial Aid office).
  - b. Look at organizations you have volunteered for (at the local and national level). Don't be shy about asking organizers/leaders.
  - c. Check out your church/denomination. Look at the local and national level if possible.
  - d. Look at organizations related to your extracurricular activities. Google "scholarships for \_\_\_ (scouts, bowlers, piano players, etc.). You will be surprised that you can find a few this way.
  - e. Check out websites that are free to use. Some of these have thousand listed. It takes time to find the ones worth applying for, but every dollar adds up. Try for the smaller scholarships as well as the larger one. Four \$500 scholarships go a long way if you get them. And it's ok to apply for some that are just "drawings" and not based on achievements.

- Be yourself and keep the focus on you. Don't try to sound impressive or sound like a professional. Be who you are at the time you are writing the essay.
- Think of some unique things along with your "average" things you do in life. Do you have a larger than usual family that has taught you to be really organized with large group activities? Have you traveled to some unique places? Do you have a unique hobby or job? Have you moved a lot? Unique does not have to mean something no one else has done—it just gives you something out of the ordinary to talk about with your life experiences.
- Mundane things can be important. Sometimes the simple things can stand out. Did you ride to school every morning with your siblings and quiz each other or sing together? Did your family hike together every summer? Simple things can show that you learned wonderful life lessons.
- Don't try to fit every single thing into an essay. It will read too much like a list. Pick three or four thoughts that answer the questions and elaborate on those thoughts with specific details. Make the answer flow like a story rather than read like a list.
- Don't share controversial opinions. You don't know who your readers will be. You can talk about your faith, but don't be judgmental against others since a reader may not share the same faith. Avoid most political topics. You can mention activities you participated in if they were political in nature, but don't base your essays on the politics.

- Don't use informal abbreviations even if you are applying online. This is not a text to a friend or a casual e-mail.
- Write in a word-processing program and paste into the boxes if you are applying online. Not all online applications will catch spelling errors.

**For students:**

If you get stuck on any writing assignments, try timed free writing exercises. What does that involve? Set a clock alarm or timer for 30 or 45 seconds. Write about your subject in pencil without stopping for the entire time. If you are writing about birds, for example, your writing may look like this:

**Birds are colorful and musical. They live in my backyard. I saw an owl when I was hiking last week. My grandmother had a pet bird that was yellow. Some birds migrate depending on the season. Big Bird lives on Sesame Street. Robins live in our backyard. Our birdfeeder attracts hummingbirds. I can't think of anything else to say. I don't know how to identify bird calls. I saw a pelican by a pier on vacation. It ate a flounder.**

Notice that I kept writing even when I had no thoughts on birds. The topics change frequently—some thoughts are about food while others are about children's TV shows. But now I have some thoughts down on paper that may lead to paper ideas, poetry ideas, story ideas or ideas for an ad.