

Composition 5: Reality Check

Essential Question: How do we evaluate the realism of a fictional work?

PROMPT: After viewing/reading and taking notes on a book or a film or a TV series (even a cartoon), write a review in which you evaluate how realistic it is. There are varying degrees of realism, so this model topic sentence may help you to state your position the way you want:

Gifted Differentiation: GIEP students must choose a literary topic, evaluating the realism of a literary work.



TOPIC SENTENCE: The [film, book, television series, cartoon, soap opera, video game] _____ seems [unrealistic, barely realistic, fairly realistic, entirely realistic]
[0] [1] [2] [3]

when evaluated in terms of the events, characters, and the setting.

INTRODUCTION IDEA: Summarize the plot if a book or a film. Describe the major characters if a TV series.

CONCLUSION IDEA: Summarize ways that the work was real/unreal...and whether the degree of realism made it better or worse. If the goal of the writer was not realism, what was it--and do you think he achieved it?

Focus Skills

1. TS/Subs/Intro/Concl
2. Frag/Run
3. Sp
4. Square 10 Vivid Verbs
5. Catchy Introduction
6. 3.5 Pages Final Copy Calibri or Arial 12

***1 Citation / MLA Works Cited Required**

+10 if critiquing literature

Mega-Tips for Content Development

- Do not regurgitate plot. Discuss only those details of the work that relate to the subtopic criteria.
- If you miss the work presented in class, select a film or book that you have access to at home as your topic.
- Use quotations when possible to demonstrate and develop your points.
- It is easier to critique a work that is unrealistic than it is one that is real—so pick something “out of this world” if you are having difficulty.
- See model essay for book citation and Works Cited formats. See your all-year packet for Works Cited formats for movies or TV shows.

SUBTOPIC ONE: In _____, [very few/ most] of the **events** seem probable.

[0] [1]

List here events that either stretch probability or seem portrayed as true-to-life with remarkable care and detail.

SUBTOPIC TWO: In _____, [few if any/ most] **characters** seem capable
 [0] [1]
 of believably motivated changes.

CHARACTER NAME	WHAT IS THE CHARACTER'S MAIN TRAIT EARLY ON IN THE STORY? HOW DOES THIS TRAIT CHANGE—IF AT ALL? Example: Selfish → Sacrificial	MOST IMPORTANT SCENES THAT REVEAL THESE TRAITS AND PROVIDE A MOTIVE THAT THE CHARACTER CHANGES OR DOES NOT CHANGE Example: Wants to cut someone's heart out in the exile scene but starves herself for a stranger in end scene--no motive for change

SUBTOPIC THREE: In _____, the **setting** captures [poorly/ accurately,] the
 [0] [1]
 aura of [insert a time and/or place here, like a 1950's American high school, the Old West, Revolutionary America, post-apocalyptic Manhattan].

List below details that make the time and the place of the story seem real... that is, historically or socially accurate. Consider details of work life, clothing styles, hair styles, music, architecture, furniture, automobiles, speech, day-to-day routines, the natural scenery, and other features that build a sense of being there in the audience.

Realistic Fiction Critique: Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" 25 pts

Subtopic Criterion 1: Probable Events

In "The Outcasts of Poker Flat", **very few [1]** **far too many [0]** events seem improbable.

"It became more and more difficult to replenish their fires...And yet _____ complained. The lovers turned from their dreary prospect [that they would soon starve to death] and looked into each other's eyes, and were _____.....The Duchess, more _____ than she had been, assumed the care of Piney."

*As the suffering intensifies after a week of freezing and starving, how do the outcasts' change emotionally? _____

*From your personal experiences of having gone even a half-day without food or shivering in sub-zero temperatures, is this emotional change probable? _____

Subtopic Criterion 2: Believably Motivated Character Changes

In "The Outcasts of Poker Flat", **most [1]** **none [0]** of the characters seem capable of believably motivated changes.

Mother Shipton is described on the opening page as "a _____ madam" who had a "desire to cut somebody's _____ out." By story's end, Oakhurst discovers her food rations under her pillow and exclaims, "You've _____ yourself."

In what way has Mother Shipton changed in the story? _____

Does Shipton know Piney? _____ Is there any evidence in the story that Shipton gradually develops a closer relationship with Piney than with any of the others? _____ Does the author provide any background evidence to indicate what motivates Shipton to do what she does for Piney? _____ Would Shipton's change have been more believable or less believable had she recognized Piney as her long-lost daughter whom she abandoned as a child so she could live out a life of prostitution? _____ Why? _____

Subtopic Criterion 3: Accurate Setting

In "The Outcasts of Poker Flat", the setting captures **accurately [1]** **poorly [0]** the aura of the Wild West.

"He returned to his pocket the _____ with which he had been whipping away the _____ of Poker Flat."

"I _____ there after somebody."

"A _____ had determined to rid the town of all improper persons. This was done permanently in regard to two men who were _____ from the boughs of a sycamore."

"The party soon passed out of the _____, _____ regions of the foot-hills inty the dry, cold, bracing air of the _____."

Are these passages accurate or poor reflections of the old west? _____

Topic Sentence: Based on the 0 → 3 Subtopic Rating Criteria Above

Bret Harte's short story "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" seems **entirely realistic [3]** **fairly realistic [2]** **barely realistic [1]** **unrealistic [0]** when evaluated in terms of its events, characters, and setting.

The Outcasts of Poker Flat

Bret Harte

As Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler, stepped into the main street of Poker Flat on the morning of the twenty-third of November, 1850, he was conscious of a change. Two or three men ceased as he approached and exchanged significant glances.

"I reckon they're after somebody," he reflected; "likely it's me." He returned to his pocket the handkerchief with which he had been whipping away the red dust of Poker Flat from his neat boots.

In point of fact, Poker Flat was "after somebody." A secret committee had determined to rid the town of all improper persons. This was done permanently in regard to two men who were then hanging from the boughs of a sycamore in the gulch, and temporarily in the banishment of certain other objectionable characters. I regret to say that some of these were ladies.

Mr. Oakhurst was right in supposing that he was included in this category. A few of the committee had urged hanging him as a sure method of reimbursing themselves from his pockets of the sums he had won from them. "It's agin justice," said Jim Wheeler, "to let this yer young man from Roaring Camp—an entire stranger—carry away our money." Mr. Oakhurst received his sentence with calmness. He was too much of a gambler not to accept Fate.

A body of armed men accompanied them to the outskirts of the settlement. Besides Mr. Oakhurst, the party consisted of a prostitute known as "The Duchess"; another, a malevolent madam who had won the title of "Mother Shipton"; and "Uncle Billy," a suspected sluice-robber and confirmed drunkard. The exiles were forbidden to return at the peril of their lives.

The philosophic Oakhurst alone remained silent. He listened calmly to Mother Shipton's desire to cut somebody's heart out.

The road to Sandy Bar seemed to offer some invitation to the emigrants but lay over a steep mountain range. It was distant a day's severe travel. In that late season, the party soon passed out of the moist, temperate regions of the foot-hills into the dry, cold, bracing air of the Sierras. The trail was narrow and difficult, but soon they settled in a clearing and made camp.

Suddenly Oakhurst heard his name called. A horseman slowly ascended the trail. In the fresh, open face of the new-comer Mr. Oakhurst recognized Tom Simson, otherwise known as "The Innocent" of Sandy Bar. He had met him some months before over a "little game," and had, won the entire fortune—amounting to some forty dollars. After the game was finished, Mr. Oakhurst drew the youthful speculator behind the door and said, "Tommy, you're a good little man, but you can't gamble worth a cent. Don't try it ever again." He then handed him his money back, pushed him gently from the room, and so made a devoted friend of Tom Simson.

Tom had started, he said, to go to Poker Flat to seek his fortune.

"Alone?" Oakhurst asked.

No, not exactly alone; in fact he had run away with Piney Woods. They had been engaged a long time, but Jake Woods had objected, and so they had run away and were going to Poker Flat to be married, and here they were. All this the Innocent delivered rapidly, while Piney, a stout, comely damsel of fifteen, emerged from behind the pine-tree.

Mr. Oakhurst seldom troubled himself with sentiment, still less with propriety; but he had a vague idea that the situation was not fortunate.

The air had grown strangely chill and the sky overcast.

Mr. Oakhurst was a light sleeper. Toward morning he awoke benumbed and cold. As he stirred the dying fire, the wind, which was now blowing strongly, brought to his cheek that which caused the blood to leave it,—snow!

He started to his feet with the intention of awakening the sleepers, for there was no time to lose. But turning to where Uncle Billy had been lying, he found him gone. He ran to the spot where the mules had been tethered; they were no longer there. The tracks were already rapidly disappearing in the snow.

He did not waken the sleepers. Mr. Oakhurst, drawing his blanket over his shoulders, stroked his mustaches and waited for the dawn. It came slowly in a whirling mist of snow-flakes that dazzled and confused the eye. He looked over the valley, and summed up the present and future in two words,—“snowed in!”

A careful inventory of the food, which had escaped the felonious fingers of Uncle Billy, disclosed the fact that they might last ten days longer. “

The cheerful gayety of the young man, and Mr. Oakhurst’s calm infected the others.

Haply the frigid days and nights were spent by an accordion, produced somewhat ostentatiously by Tom Simson from his pack. But the crowning festivity of the evening was reached in a rude camp meeting hymn, which the lovers, joining hands, sang with great earnestness and vociferation.

So with small food and much of the accordion, a week passed over the heads of the outcasts. The sun again forsook them, and again from leaden skies the snow-flakes were sifted over the land. Day by day closer around them drew the snowy circle, until at last they looked from their prison over drifted walls of dazzling white, that towered twenty feet above their heads. It became more and more difficult to replenish their fires, even from the fallen trees beside them, now half hidden in the drifts. And yet no one complained. The lovers turned from the dreary prospect and looked into each other’s eyes, and were happy. Mr. Oakhurst settled himself coolly to the losing game before him. The Duchess, more cheerful than she had been, assumed the care of Piney. Only Mother Shipton—once the strongest of the party—seemed to sicken and fade. At midnight on the tenth day she called Oakhurst to her side.

“I’m going,” she said, in a voice of querulous weakness, “but don’t say anything about it. Don’t waken the kids. Take the bundle from under my head and open it.” Mr. Oakhurst did so. It contained Mother Shipton’s rations for the last week, untouched. “Give ’em to the child,” she said, pointing to the sleeping Piney.

“You’ve starved yourself,” said the gambler.

“That’s what they call it,” said the woman as she lay down again, and, turning her face to the wall, passed quietly away.

The accordion and the bones were put aside that day, and when the body of Mother Shipton had been committed to the snow, Mr. Oakhurst took the Innocent aside, and showed him a pair of snow-shoes, which he had fashioned from the old pack-saddle. “There’s one chance in a hundred to save her yet,” he said, pointing to Piney; “but it’s there,” he added, pointing toward Poker Flat. “If you can reach there in two days she’s safe.” “And you?” asked Tom Simson. “I’ll stay here,” was the curt reply.

The lovers parted with a long embrace. “You are not going, too?” said the Duchess, as she saw Mr. Oakhurst apparently waiting to accompany him. “As far as the canyon,” he replied. He turned

suddenly, and kissed the Duchess, leaving her pallid face aflame, and her trembling limbs rigid with amazement.

Night came, but not Mr. Oakhurst. It brought the storm again and the whirling snow. Then the Duchess, feeding the fire, found that some one had quietly piled beside the hut enough fuel to last a few days longer. The tears rose to her eyes, but she hid them from Piney.

The women slept but little. In the morning, looking into each other's faces, they read their fate. Neither spoke; but Piney, accepting the position of the stronger, drew near and placed her arm around the Duchess's waist. They kept this attitude for the rest of the day. That night the storm reached its greatest fury, and, rending asunder the protecting pines, invaded the very hut.

Toward morning they found themselves unable to feed the fire, and they fell asleep peacefully for the last time.

They slept all that day and the next, nor did they waken when voices and footsteps broke the silence of the camp. And when the Law of Poker Flat brushed the snow from their wan faces, you could scarcely tell which was she that had sinned. Even the law of Poker Flat recognized this and turned away, leaving them locked in each other's arms.

But at the head of the gulch, on one of the largest pine trees, they found the deuce of clubs pinned to the bark with a bowie-knife. It bore the following, written in pencil, in a firm hand:—

Beneath This Tree
Lies The Body
Of
John Oakhurst,
Who Struck A Streak Of Bad Luck
On The 23d Of November, 1850,
And
Handed In His Checks
On The 7th December, 1850.

And pulseless and cold, with a Derringer by his side and a bullet in his heart, though still calm as in life, beneath the snow lay he who was at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat.

GTA: Brutally Burlesquing the American Dream

Grand Theft Auto IV by Rockstar Games is a gritty open-world sandbox game released in 2008. Set in its release year, *Grand Theft Auto IV* tells the story of Niko Bellic, an emotionally distraught Serbian war veteran and criminal as he lands in America to meet his cousin Roman in the fictional New York parody, Liberty City. The story follows the cousins Bellic as they are caught up in the city's criminal underworld of drugs, murder, and theft due to Roman's gambling habits and Niko's own torn past as a criminal. Along the way, Niko **pursues** his true goal in coming to America; find the member of his military unit who betrayed the group during the war, and avenge his fallen brothers. As Niko climbs the ladder of criminal infamy, he is met with numerous challenges and betrayals by old and new enemies which impact his mindset towards attaining his goal. Niko's exploits as a hitman both help and hurt Roman, who enjoys the wealthy living that Niko's ill-earned wealth brings, while being the target of retaliation by Niko's enemies. Niko comes to terms with his felonious lifestyle as he witnesses the deaths of both his mortal enemies and best friends. These events **skew** his perception of his goal to avenge his unit, and of the American Dream itself which the cousins both yearn for so vehemently. While the foreign characters and illegal lifestyles are not relatable for many Americans and the events which cause these realizations are often unrealistic, the dilemmas and moral choices these characters find throughout their dealings are entirely human. *Grand Theft Auto IV* is a fairly, hauntingly realistic thriller of a game surrounding a shell of a man and his journey through the dregs of a **caricatured** city. The **events, characters, and setting** of *Grand Theft Auto IV* help to reinforce its fairly realistic atmosphere.

In *Grand Theft Auto IV*, most of the **events** and missions rely on fairly circumstantial and unrealistic events to drive the plot, although many of the motives, theories, and outcomes of these events do seem plausible. A few of the realistic events include Niko's time in the war as a teenager. The story of Niko's experiences in the war are told in snippets and flashbacks, often given by Niko as he ponders his existence in the criminal underworld of Liberty City. Niko was a member of a small group of several friends from his village who all experienced horrors that no young man can be accustomed to as soldiers in the Yugoslav wars. The idea of betrayal is seen here first as a member of the unit sold out the group, resulting in the deaths of all but three of them, including Niko. Niko has made it his life's goal to get to the bottom of who betrayed his unit and avenge his fallen comrades. These events, which depict Niko as a disillusioned war veteran, are entirely realistic and mirror many perceptions of the Yugoslav Wars, which are characterized by brutality and horror. However, the rest of the story is often driven by unrealistic events. Niko participates in a number of drug deals during his time as muscle for local drug queen Elizabeta Torres. One of these deals involves Niko, a prominent gangbanger and Elizabeta's friend dubbed Playboy X, and an outlaw biker named Johnny. The deal turns out to be a sting operation and Johnny escapes from the

apartment complex on the ground as Niko and Playboy battle their way over the rooftops. The chances of two criminals managing to run across numerous open rooftops, **dispatching** several groups of armed police forces, then escaping in a vehicle is extremely unlikely. This same pattern of small-time criminals performing over the top acts becomes a trope for the game's missions, seen again shortly after the drug deal shootout. Playboy invites Niko to visit the building site of rich Arabian contractor Yusuf Amir, who Playboy **aspires** to become friends with. Playboy tasks Niko with rescuing Yusuf's building site from local mafia union bosses. The siege, which involves Niko sniping several Mafioso foes off of cranes and then battling in the construction site against even more enemies in a helicopter, is also extremely improbable. No one would manage to **appropriate** a building site and litter it with armed guards in the center of a bustling metropolis, nor could one man subsequently take it back from them. However, these events are still concluded relatively realistically; instead of escaping the law and living happily ever after, Elizabeta and the rest of the group are soon monitored by the government, with Torres herself facing life in jail. Yusuf disregards Playboy's criminal heroics and instead **erects** a monument dedicated to those killed at the site.

In contrast, many of the main **characters** in Grand Theft Auto IV's story experience life-altering paradigm shifts that result in realistic character changes. The most prominent and fleshed out of these changes occur in Niko. Niko begins his story as a fresh off the boat immigrant living with his cousin in a filthy apartment, doing chores for local Russian gangsters to repay Roman's gambling debts. As Niko **familiarizes** himself with increasingly infamous crime lords and undertakes extremely risky and conspicuous tasks, he and Roman find themselves surrounded by both old enemies such as his previous employer Ray Bulgarin, and new ones, such as Bulgarin's henchman Dimitri Rascalov. Bulgarin and Dimitri burn down the cousins' apartment and place bounties on their heads in retaliation for Niko's supposed treason against Bulgarin's smuggling operations. Niko's attempts to murder Dimitri place him at the will of a corrupt government bureau which offers Niko an ultimatum to help him complete his goals; the bureau promises to grant Niko protection and to track the traitor in Niko's unit as long as Niko continues to assassinate numerous threats to 'national security.' Niko is successful and comes face to face with the man who betrayed him and his friends, Darko Brevic. Brevic, now a drug-addicted bum, explains that he sold the group out to the enemy in exchange for a thousand dollars to buy drugs. Niko is furious at Darko's apathetic reasoning behind the deaths that ruined his adult life, until Darko points out Niko's hypocrisy, noting that all Niko has done to reach this point is murder aimlessly. At this point, one can choose to have Niko avenge his comrades by killing Darko, or simply walk away to let him live. Either choice leaves Niko feeling empty and confused, the closure and peace he wished to achieve from the search escaping him just as Brevic had done for years. Niko **resolves** to end his criminal life and provide for Roman and himself in other, safer ways. This is a perfect example of believable change as Niko's motives and rationale behind the hunt for Darko are illustrated throughout the beginning of the story, before being dashed away at the end, evoking a sense of worthlessness in Niko for the lifestyle he

has chosen. Likewise, Niko's gambling and swinging Cousin Roman is also affected by the life of crime. Roman's emotions tug at him; on one hand, Roman enjoys the lavish lifestyle that Niko's blood money brings in, but fears for his own life at the hands of Niko's many enemies. Roman resolves to make a change in his ways after witnessing Niko's sense of loss following the incident with Darko, and decides to marry his girlfriend and assist Niko in starting a business, to finally live the American Dream.

The most realistic aspect of *Grand Theft Auto IV* is its **setting**. The fictional Liberty City, "A stunningly realized virtual version of New York City caked with all the dust, wear, and dents you'd expect to see while walking down an actual street" (Onyett), perfectly captures modern New York and all of its baggage. To the far East is Dukes, the first borough Niko encounters. Russian immigrants and homeless bums **litter** the tightly knit streets while dilapidated metro trains zip by overhead. Further west is Broker, the more affluent side of the island. Hipsters and lavish suburban homes line the area, surrounded by green forestry. The second island, Algonquin, is a caricature of districts such as the Bronx and Manhattan. The Triangle is **smear**ed in neon lights, fast food restaurants, and street performers trying to make it big. Further North, Holland depicts the ghettos of the Bronx and Queens, with numerous high-rise projects and abandoned construction as gangbangers patrol the graffiti-lined sidewalks. As well as the overall setting, Liberty City's modern outlook is **fleshed out** by the choices of clothing, music, food, and transportation available. Faded jeans and white sneakers fit the era well, as do thick-rimmed glasses and semi-casual suit jackets, all of which are fashion options Niko partakes in. The various radio stations reflect modern New York's musical trends and history. Radio Broker portrays the ironic hipster scene with independent post-punk and dance tracks, while The Beat **blares** modern hip-hop and rap centered in Algonquin. As well as the modern stations, various offerings such as Liberty City Hard Core, a station which plays a selection of NYHC classics, **illustrate** the connections between Liberty City and New York's older musical trends. Perhaps another of Rockstar's humorous comments on modern society, no fancy food restaurants are in Liberty City, only grimy fast food chains and greasy food kiosks. Nothing says modern America like a hormone-fuelled burger. The most important aspect of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, the vehicles, is perhaps the best attempt at realism in the game. Visiting Dukes, various smuggled European sedans and SUVs line the streets. Beaters wheeze by, backfiring and occasionally stalling in the middle of an intersection. Conversely, high-end sports coupes and luxurious imports **dominate** the grinding Algonquin traffic jams, with an overbearing presence of yellow taxi cabs. Alderney, the industrial side of Liberty City is coated in dull, economical sedans and large, thundering dump trucks and tractor trailers. Each of these unique vehicles fit in perfectly with their respective areas of Liberty City's sprawling concrete jungle. The attention to detail in the types and placement of the various vehicles and other themes serves to bring the various boroughs' streets to life, **fashioning** a perfect caricature of modern New York.

Grand Theft Auto IV is the rare example of a videogame offering an almost pessimistic sense of detail, believable characters, and a gripping and interesting story.

Niko Bellic's story is unique and is expanded upon throughout the game, creating a bond with the criminal and portraying his motives for his life of crime in a believable light, if a tad realistic in its methods. The various details in the setting's vehicles, radio stations, and clothing all expand upon the sprawling landscapes, prevailing skyscrapers, and desolate projects. All things considered, Grand Theft Auto IV is a hauntingly realistic depiction of the horrors of crime, the ultimate consequences of revenge and betrayal, and the decadence in American society which occasionally blurs the lines of realism in order to offer a fun, rewarding, and compelling story.

Works Cited

Onyett, Charles. "Rockstar's action opus finally lands on the PC." *IGN*. 2 December 2008. Web. 3 Nov. 2014.

Introductions and Conclusions

INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions should be half a page long and feature a topic sentence at the end. Most importantly, introductions should hook your reader's attention in some way. This means that you must do your best writing in your introduction. Use these techniques to help...and whatever you do, use some **vivid verbs!**

THE PLOT SUMMARY TECHNIQUE

[Use this technique when writing about a story or a film whose major events you will summarize.]

In L. Frank Baum's classic *The Wizard of Oz*, a girl named Dorothy is **swept** away to a mystical land on the breath of a cyclone. She becomes **embroiled** in a conflict between the forces of good and evil when she accidentally kills a witch whose sister **vows** revenge. Befriended by a Scarecrow, Tin Woodsman, and a Cowardly Lion, Dorothy eludes the Wicked Witch while journeying along the yellow brick road to the Emerald City, where she hopes to find a Wizard who will help her to return to Kansas. As it turns out, with the magic of the ruby slippers, home is only three clicks away. While the story *The Wizard of Oz* is wonderful entertainment for most children, many scenes in the film may be unsuitable for very young children, among them the cyclone scene, the melting scene, and the flying monkey scene.

THE RHETORICAL QUESTION TECHNIQUE

[Use this technique by posing a question that is not easily answered to get the reader thinking—start with words like “why” or “what would” or “how.” Then, follow up the question with some possible answers beginning with the words “perhaps” or “maybe”.]

What would happen if students were given total control of Tyrone High? *Perhaps* education would **deteriorate** into a three-ring curriculum **featuring** Spit Wad Technology, Video Game Science, and Advanced Hallway Necking. In this scenario, discipline might disappear into hallways **reeking** of marijuana, and the school police would be burned in effigy in the school courtyard. Teachers would be sent to detention hall for failure to give high enough grades or boring students with useless information. On the other hand, *perhaps* students might use better judgment and push for more meaningful reforms, like buying novels that are more interesting to teenagers yet still are artistically challenging. Such student leaders would perhaps be tougher on students who cause disruption and threaten school safety than are the current leaders. If students ran Tyrone High, curriculum, discipline, and school safety might all improve.

THE IMAGINE TECHNIQUE

[Use this technique by starting with the word “imagine” to invite the reader to picture a vivid scene related to the topic. Use the pronoun you to keep the reader involved.]

Imagine a world in which drugs and controlled substances were completely legal. You **roll** out of bed to go to school at 7 A.M., and...no, you stay in bed two more hours because everyone is tardy with hangovers anyway. Lighting a joint, you **hop** in your Porsche, which you **purchased** with all your drug money, and hit the road—and a few pedestrians, too, but that’s no matter. They weren’t your customers anyway. You park in the student lot, where every car has a fender or bumper missing. It’s hell on the highway, you see, like an arena of direction-less bumper cars. In the hallway, you put a ten-dollar bill into the “Coke” machine and pull out the baggie, free straw included. A few gunshots echo down the hall and some blood is spilled. The janitors clean it up and throw the body in the dumpster with the others. Again, it’s okay--they weren’t your customers. “It wasn’t me,” you laugh, “it’ll never happen to me.” Contrary to the arguments of drug users, legalizing drugs will not make the world a better place. Legalization will only threaten public health, drive up insurance rates, and bastardize the efforts of our schools to educate young people.

THE ANECDOTE TECHNIQUE

[Use this technique by telling an entertaining or relevant story related to the topic of your essay.]

The first time that I fell in love [I was five years old] was with my kindergarten teacher. She wore a sweet vanilla perfume that **wafted** over my desk whenever she was trying to help me, and she gave all the boys and girls hugs after school each day. I do not know about the other boys in class, but I counted the minutes down to the bell and that warm vanilla-scented embrace near the schoolyard bell. I **longed** for that beautiful swirl of blond hair and those emerald eyes that **whispered** “I love you” even if the lips did not necessarily move to speak those words. I dreamed about her at night and talked about her all day. My parents thought that I loved school and were proud of my enthusiasm. Fact is, I didn’t give a crap about paste and scissors. Love comes in many forms, among them puppy love, romance, brotherly love, and friendship.

THE QUOTATION TECHNIQUE

[Use this technique by locating a quotation relevant to your topic and then responding to the ideas in the quote.]

“There is nothing to fear but fear itself,” Roosevelt said during the 1930’s, a time when Depression and War were real fears that every American **suffered**. Perhaps there is some truth to Roosevelt’s claim since it is human nature to **exaggerate** reality when we are under stress. Doomsday thinking comes naturally in times of financial or military turmoil. Still, life can be treacherous, and even small dangers like slippery sidewalks and thunderstorms can **propel** us to death and physical injury. Unlike Roosevelt, when it comes to snakes, rejection, and public speaking, I believe that there is more to fear than fear itself.

THE FACTS AND STATISTICS TECHNIQUE

[Use this technique in persuasive papers where you are trying to change somebody's opinion with proof.]

Tyrone schools deserve more credit than the public is willing to give them. Of course, everybody knows that athletics is a strong point, with 22 conference championships in the last decade among all programs, including the State Champion 1999 Football Team. Academically, Tyrone has been first in the State in Writing as **measured** by the PSSA exam for the last two years in a row. SAT scores have **skyrocketed** since 1997 at a rate 1250% faster than the national average. Safety-wise, incidents of weapons possession and violence have **plummeted** 68% since the installation of video cameras and school police officers. In terms of athletics, academics, and safety, Tyrone High deserves more respect than it gets.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions can be as brief as one sentence or as long as a half page. They can simply summarize your subtopics or they can invite the reader to think about possibilities not mentioned in your essay at all. The three techniques below give you some options.

THE ONE-SENTENCE PERIODIC SUMMARY TECHNIQUE

[Use this technique by listing your subtopic points from your topic sentence, following these points with a double dash, then using the word “these _____” to finish.]

Athletics, academics, and safety—these three aspects of education at Tyrone High deserve the public’s respect. [see the topic sentence for the facts and statistics introduction technique to see how this conclusion was created.]

THE PERSONAL COMMENTARY OR OPINION TECHNIQUE

[Use this technique to offer a personal reflection or commentary on the issue.]

Public schools will always be the targets of severe public criticism and scapegoating. Face it, everybody can point to at least one negative school experience, and those negative experiences often turn into resentment in later years as alumni become parents with their own children in local schools. Often, these parents either forget or never realized what opportunities their schools afford their children—especially now that their tax dollars are financing the schools that they remember as the source of all their failure or frustration in life. At Tyrone High, at least, such negativism is undeserved. Never before has the school been more successful in so many arenas.

FLASHBACK TO AN IDEA PRESENTED IN THE INTRODUCTION

[Use this technique by referring again to a quote, fact, statistic, question, or story used in your introduction.]

This conclusion is a flashback to the anecdote introduction on love previously mentioned.

So for me, love all began in kindergarten. Sure, it was all infatuation and puppy love, but as I grew, so did my concept and understanding of love. Love can mean romance and roses just as it can mean a hug from your best friend. It can mean the bond between brothers and sisters and neighbors, and ultimately, the relationship you have with God. To this day, there is something heavenly about the smell of vanilla, the sweet perfume of my kindergarten days.

PRACTICE

Select an informative and persuasive essay from your portfolio. Rewrite the introduction and conclusion using one of the techniques you learned in this section.