

Directions: The more you use this MLA Planning Sheet, the easier your MLA paper will be to write. This planning sheet will cover general tips, the steps to make an MLA paper, thesis statement generation, and include a graphic organizer for you to record your findings as you read your novel.

Some Tips:

- **Citations are the “cat’s meow,”** so to speak. The more you can cite from the book to support your ideas, the better. For example:
 - Weak: In the novel, the Chief is crazy.
 - Strong: In the novel, the Chief’s narration seems to border on insanity: “[The nurse is] swelling up, swells till her back’s splitting out the white uniform and she’s let her arms section out long enough to wrap around the three of them five, six times” (Kesey 2).

You might be wondering what the difference is between these two examples...after all, they say the same thing, don’t they? Keep in mind, MLA style favors close attention to textual detail; by stating *your* idea supported by a citation, you’ve strengthened your opinion by providing textual proof for your claims. This prevents outrageous claims being made that have no textual basis.

- **Only cite memorable phrases or sentences.** Unless your citation adds something to your essay, don’t use it. When students write their first MLA paper, most have a tendency to either cite too much or too little. Remember, the goal is to have an idea and to support that idea by examples in the text. Those examples should be the strongest you can find to prove your point. If you have 5 examples of something, but only 3 can be properly explained, use just 3.
- **It’s *your* interpretation,** after all. Remember to follow up your citations with your commentary, interpretation, or analysis. For example:
 - Weak: In the novel, the Chief’s narration seems to border on insanity: “[The nurse is] swelling up, swells till her back’s splitting out the white uniform and she’s let her arms section out long enough to wrap around the three of them five, six times” (Kesey 2)
 - Strong: In the novel, the Chief’s narration seems to border on insanity: “[The nurse is] swelling up, swells till her back’s splitting out the white uniform and she’s let her arms section out long enough to wrap around the three of them five, six times” (Kesey 2). In this line, we can see that the Chief believes the nurse to be some sort of animal with multiple arms, ready to kill at a moment’s notice.

Again, it’s a matter of stating an idea, supporting it by a citation, and further explaining what that line signifies to you, the reader.

- **When in doubt, speak with Hampton.** I’m always available for help, either before or after school or through email (jonathan.hampton@marion.k12.fl.us). If you have an idea, or need some general help getting started, feel free to ask. No, I won’t write your paper for you. But, I can tell you if your topic is a rich cornucopia of deliciousness or a barren wasteland of pain.

STEP 1: CHOOSE A TOPIC (OR TOPICS)

Example: "Symbolism in *A Streetcar Named Desire*."

STEP 2: COLLECT TEXTUAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT TOPIC

<u>Page # or location</u>	<u>Quote</u>	<u>Said By (Author or Character Name)</u>	<u>My Thoughts / Analysis</u>
Scene 1, Line 75	"And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!"	Blanche	Blanche seems terribly afraid of light...light shows everything, including imperfections, which maybe Blanche is afraid of?
Pg. 60	"I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action."	Blanche	Again, Blanche mentions her fear of light...what is she hiding from? Maybe light can symbolize truth?

<u>Page # or location</u>	<u>Quote</u>	<u>Said By (Author or Character Name)</u>	<u>My Thoughts / Analysis</u>

Examples→

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STEP 3: WRITE A THESIS STATEMENT FOR YOUR PAPER

The thesis statement is a quick 1-2 sentence opener that helps the reader generalize the ideas explored in the passage, chapter, or novel you are studying. The statement usually has three parts: a subject, a method, and a message. The subject portion identifies the title/author, the method identifies the literary technique or device the author uses, and the message conveys the idea or lesson the author seeks to have the reader consider. See below:

In _____, _____
(title of piece) (author's name)

Uses/employs _____ to reveal _____
(method) (message)

Thesis Statement Examples:

- In *Rabbit, Run*, John Updike uses biblical names to reveal deeper insight into his characters and their personalities.
- In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Ken Kesey uses the experiences of one character in an insane asylum to convey the morality of the staff and patients.
- In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, McMurphy, the Chief and the Big Nurse, are excellent examples of Sigmund Freud's Id, Ego and Super ego.

Thesis Statement Non-Example:

- In *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Ken Kesey practices feminist criticism to reveal the harshness and power the Big Nurse carries and how she demands it from everyone in the ward, accepting nothing less. (Author's don't use criticisms...they are usually dead and aren't doing much of anything. You use the criticisms when reading to help focus on something particular about the text, such as gender relationships, moral and biographical issues, etc. A better thesis statement for this topic would be: In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey's portrayal of the Big Nurse is harsh, unyielding, and quite unfeminine.)

STEP 4: SOLIDIFY EVIDENCE FOR THESIS STATEMENT

At this point, you'll want to look back over your evidence collected in Step 2. Compare what data you've collected with your new thesis statement. **Highlight** or star (*) evidence that you feel greatly contributes to answering your thesis statement. Do not highlight or star everything; only include information that is relevant and that you can adequately explain.

STEP 5: WRITE YOUR FIRST PARAGRAPH

After your thesis statement, comes a few sentences that make up your first paragraph. You do not want to cite anything in this paragraph, but instead give a general overview of what things you've noticed while reading that supports your thesis statement. Again, do not cite—that's what the rest of your MLA paper is for!

First paragraph example: In the novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Ken Kesey depicts his female characters along the lines of typical stereotyping and in doing so reflects the mindset of male dominion during the 1960's. More specifically, whether intentionally or not is to be debated, he paints the picture of women constantly de-masculinizing men. This is best analyzed through the characters Nurse Ratched, Harding's Wife, and Billy Bibbit's mother. Throughout the book these characters denote aspects of being overbearing or enabling. In all aspects, their personas are interpreted as demeaning. Furthermore each action they take has a direct ripple effect not only on those who the women are closest to but the men surrounding the events.

STEP 6: WRITE THE REST OF YOUR ESSAY

The good news is, if you've successfully completed Steps 1-5, this part will be much easier! This process is simply looking over your highlighted or starred items from Step 4 and placing them in your essay. The most crucial part of this process is remembering to explain why you've chosen them (which, by the way, should be partially completed anyway in Step 2). Once you get "grooving," the process becomes pretty smooth: explain what is happening...include citation...properly explain how citation contributes to my ideas and/or thesis statement.

Body paragraph example: Rose of Sharon begins the novel in a predictable way best depicted in Chapter thirteen of the *Grapes of Wrath*: "She was all secrets now that she was pregnant, secrets and little silences that seemed to have meanings. She was pleased with herself, and she complained about things that didn't really matter. And she demanded services of Connie that were silly, and both of them knew they were silly." (Steinbeck 129) Steinbeck portrays Rose of Sharon as a run of the mill girl expecting a child, profoundly in love with her young husband, Connie. All of her actions and expectations of everyone around her, especially Connie are exceptionally selfish, self-serving and most of all ridiculous. Rose of Sharon is additionally described to be full of secrets with hidden messages; the way that she looks at Connie suggests that there is a deeper meaning to her actions and displays. Those secret looks were only shared with Connie, it could be said that they had their own language with each other; everything they said "was a kind of secret" (Steinbeck 129). The secrets between the young couple could've only been really known by Rose of Sharon while Connie acted and or thought that he knew them too.

STEP 7: PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD, PROOFREAD

Congratulations...you've completed your first MLA paper! Of course, now that it's done (the day before it's due, I'm sure), you'll be wanting to proofread your paper. Preferably, you'll also want to get someone else to proofread your paper; you'd be surprised how looking at the same paper for long periods of time can make you skip over your own terrible spelling. Don't forget, besides looking for spelling and grammatical errors, try to look for lapses in analysis; did you explain everything that needed explaining or is something missing from your paper? As a last note before you send it to me (on time, I'm sure), did you remember to include your Works Cited page? You'd be surprised how many people forget to send one!