LITERARY ANALYSIS ESSAY
OUTLINE

Introductory Paragraph
Begin with your thesis statement that tells the reader what your paper will try to prove. Get right to your opinion statement. No need for introductory summary. Eliminate phrases like “this paper will show that…” or “In this essay, I will discuss…”; rather state directly what the thesis is.

Make sure you have an “arguable” position that does not state the “obvious.” Make an arguable statement by stating both sides (pro/con). Con=contrast to your position. Pro=support of your position.

Obvious/No Argument Thesis: Chris McCandless was a troubled young man with little understanding of the Alaskan wilderness.

Arguable Thesis with con/pro statements
(con) While Chris McCandless demonstrated strong convictions of living a simple life, unfettered by societal or parent expectations, (pro) he developed important relationships with key people that helped him on his journey into the wild. (State the two or three persons he became close to on his travels.)

Body Paragraphs
Support or develop your thesis through argument AND examples in each body paragraph. Each paragraph should include:
1) a topic sentence (critical analysis)

Sample Topic Sentence: “While Chris seemed alienated from his parents, he demonstrated a respect towards Ron Franz.”

2) supporting examples and details that support thesis
(Do not summarize entire passages from any of the readings. Be particular in choosing the specific passages and either quote directly or paraphrase.) Synthesize evidence with critical analysis by stating why these examples support thesis.

3) closing or transitional statement at the end of the paragraph that summarizes the main idea of this paragraph or leads to the next discussion point. (critical analysis)

Concluding Paragraph
Draw the discussion to a close by either:
1) leaving the reader with an overall reaction

2) support the thesis with a final reflection – avoid restating thesis directly
HOW DO I GET A THESIS?

Before you can come up with an argument on any question, you have to collect and organize evidence, look for possible relationships between known facts (such as surprising contrasts or similarities), and think about the beneath-the-surface significance of these relationships.

After this initial exploration of the question, you can formulate a “working thesis.” an argument that you think will make sense of the evidence but that may need adjustment along the way.

Question: Do you see Chris as a courageous adventurer or a reckless idiot?

Step One: List all of the ideas you can think for the two parts to this question:
A) Chris as a courageous adventurer
- developed important relationships with those who could help him on his journey

B) Chris as a reckless idiot
- Never told his parents about his plans

Step Two: Reflect on the various lists and formulate a working thesis that chooses to defend a particular idea under A or B. This is your “pro” thesis statement – what you want to support or argue for.

“Pro” Statement: “Chris developed important relationships with key people that helped him on his journey into the wild.”

Step Three: Given your “pro” thesis statement, write the “con” position that shows the opposite side to your position.

“Con” Statement: “Chris preferred to be unfettered by family/social responsibilities.”

Step Four: Put the two statements together writing the “con” first and then qualifying your argument with your “pro” statement.

Full Thesis Statement: (Con) While Chris preferred to be unfettered by family or social responsibilities, (Pro) he developed important relationships with key people that helped him on his journey into the wild.
ELEMENTS OF A STRONG PARAGRAPH

Step One: Create a Topic Sentence
(Critical Opinion Statement – Not Summary Statement)

Critical Opinion Statement
While Chris seemed alienated from his own father, he seemed to develop a father/son relationship with Ron Franz.

Summary Statement
Chris met Ron Franz near the Salton Sea when hitchhiking.

Step Two: Add evidence from the text reduced to a summary statement plus your critical analysis of this evidence to support your thesis.

(Evidence) Chris learned how to inscribe images on a leather belt from Ron. (Critical Analysis) This partnership demonstrated a mentor relationship, proving Chris respected Ron and his talents.

Complete Paragraph:
While Chris seemed alienated from his own father, he seemed to develop a father/son relationship with Ron Franz. Chris learned how to inscribe images on a leather belt from Ron. He carved different images of his journey on his leather belt. Also, Chris called Ron on his 81st birthday. This partnership demonstrated a mentor relationship, proving Chris respected Ron and their relationship. (If applicable, add any evidence of Chris evading Ron’s affections to show the balance between the “pro” or “con” idea in main thesis.)