

Character Sketch Guidelines

A Character Sketch is a great way for your student to assess the characters in the literature they are reading or people that they are researching about. It can give them tools of observation as they look at the many details about another individual.

When studying a specific character in a literary piece the sketch gives the student the freedom to be a detective and try to find out what the author is expressing through their characters. They can sketch the protagonist (the favorable hero or heroine in the story,) or the antagonist (the character which causes the conflict for the main character), or the supporting characters. Assigning this kind of paper sharpens the skill of observation and note-taking as they focus on one specific character and the traits that make them 'who they are' in the book.

Can you write a sketch without a book to study? Absolutely! A great way to give them practice for writing from a literary piece is to sketch someone they know in real-life. Choosing someone they admire makes it both fun and encouraging. (Plus what a blessing it would be to share it with the person they are writing about.)

When you are writing a Character Sketch, want to look for qualities of character and/or personality traits that you see in the person you want to write about. The main goal of the assignment is to be able to tell something about the person you are researching. Think of it like an introduction. In essence, you are introducing the reader to the person you are writing about.

Be sure to use strong visual words in your writing. You want to provide a lasting mental image of the person or character you are writing about. The use of quality adjectives and feeling in your writing, using words that relate to the five senses, elicit an emotional response from your reader. This will allow your reader to not only connect with you and the character but will show how you felt when reading a piece or spending time with the person you are writing about.

A character sketch is not a history of the person this type of paper requires you to give only a brief glimpse of the individual. When you are preparing to write make a list of the traits or details you want to include. If you have a word limit on the assignment it is possible to assign the number of traits equal to the # of paragraphs or supporting topics needed. Or you can categorize the subjects into a broader spectrum which allows you to have multiple supporting points for each topic. It is always best to outline your writing material first so you have a good idea what you are writing.

Your outline should include descriptions on the following details:

- Tell about their physical features. (hair color, height, etc.)
- Tell about the character's personality. (are they funny, serious, quiet, etc.?)
- Their likes or dislikes(What you know about their preferences and why?)
- Talk about their family (siblings, family history, etc)
- What are their beliefs or hobbies?
- Include anything that makes us see "who" they are.
- What do you like or dislike about them?
- Why are you drawn to them?

Here is a sample outline for you to follow. It is a basic 5 paragraph (approximately 500 wd essay outline) Feel free to take this and make it your own or make your own outline using this as a guide.

I. Introduction:

This section will introduce the character and is typically the 1st paragraph in your paper. It should include the following:

- Your thesis statement (the overall theme of the paper or the main idea of what you are writing) . The Thesis statement should include the most important character traits.
- The subtopics (these become the topic sentence in your body paragraphs) should be included in this paragraph as well. For example: use 1 - 2 sentences to list the traits that you are going to talk about. End with a transition sentence that ties into the 2nd paragraph.

II. Body:

This is paragraphs 2-4 or the in between paragraphs. The body comes between the Introduction and the Conclusion. These paragraphs detail the traits listed as the subtopics from the Introduction. Those subtopics should be the topic sentences in each body paragraph.

- Always try to include the most important trait 1st, the second most important detail next, and so on. Each paragraph has 1 trait which is discussed in detail. Include information about experiences that support the trait which is being discussed.
 - Remember! *You want to pull your reader in so include details that will connect them to your main character.*

III. Conclusion:

This is the last paragraph in your paper. Try to conclude with a final comment, pointed and well-expressed, that highlights the traits discussed in the paper.

- Restate your thesis statement.
- Remind the reader of your most important points.
- Close with a solid statement which finalizes all you are trying to communicate to the reader.

Remember a good paragraph is 3-7 sentences. All sentences need to have a subject and a predicate. They should be a complete thought. Utilize tools of dress up in your writing. ie: quality adjectives, strong verbs, adverbs, prepositions, adverbial and or adjectival clauses etc. A GREAT resource for this is the IEW Student Resource Notebook which you can find on the Institute for Excellence in Writing Website.

Last point! RE-read your papers. I always encourage my students to write their rough draft and then walk away for at least a day or two. Then go back with FRESH eyes and re-read it. Always have someone else read it through for those little editing mistakes it is easy to miss in your own writing.