

*The following suggestions were typed in the computer lab on October 7, 2014, while I watched the Honors English class begin their term papers. Students were given a packet of information, the front page of which included the prompt, textual references (with page numbers), and some suggestions about essay structure. These suggestions were based on what I saw the students doing as they began writing. There is no particular organization, and they are worded informally because I was in a hurry.*

**Third-person:** Remove all the *I thinks* and *In my opinions* – just say it without inserting yourself into the equation. This does not mean that your paper won't have a genuine voice (yours), but don't make it a paper about you.

**Don't name the assignment** in an attempt to illustrate how painful this is for you or how much work it requires. Don't discuss how long the class has been working on it; in fact, don't mention the class at all. Your readers don't want to know that it was an assignment. They just want to read an engaging, well written paper.

**Effective attention getters** can include things besides rhetorical questions....

*"Avast, land lubbers!" While the pirate-speech and high adventure of Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island contributes to a fast-paced story for children, ....*

*If you have never climbed a bowsprit, you probably don't know how it feels to be smacked by a flying jib flapping in the salty breeze on the lee side of the forecastle, but you will after reading Robert Louis Stevenson's classic adventure Treasure Island....*

**Background information:** Make it mainly about the novel, not the experience you are going through.

- Name the author
- Brief summary of the situation of the novel and the narrator & main characters – a "blurb"
- In the case of this paper, it is significant that everything we know about Silver, we know through Jim's eyes. That is the main interaction on which we will make our claim, so it is worth mentioning something to that effect in your background information.
- (Do not, for the sake of all that is holy, retell the whole story! This isn't where you have to prove you read the book.)

**Primary Claim: Thesis Statement** – Clear and Simple, no question as to which stand you will take. It is a good idea to put this at the end of your introductory paragraph.

NOT A QUESTION – A statement! A claim!

*Example: Although he is a thief and a killer who leads a mutiny, Long John Silver is not a typical pirate.*

*Example: Despite his occasional compassion and nobility, Long John Silver is a typical pirate at heart.*

**"How long does it have to be?"**

**I swear I will make you walk the plank if you ask me that!**

## Body Paragraphs:

Because you have all been raised in a world of “five-paragraph essays,” that seems to be the standard we always shoot for...just realize that the five-paragraph essay is nothing more than a convenient pattern to follow, designed for people who weren’t creative enough to do better. The five-paragraph structure is not a requirement of academic writing; it is the bare minimum. It’s what we fall back on when we’re in a hurry. Good academic writing has an introduction, a body that makes the argument and addresses counterclaims, and a conclusion. There is no law that says the body of a paper only has to have three paragraphs. What happens if you think of FIVE different ways that Silver is not a typical pirate and you have lots of evidence for each? Does that mean you cram all five into three paragraphs just for the sake of maintaining tradition? NO. Or, what if you have to address more than one counterclaim?

Speaking of counterclaims...should you address them one at a time in the body paragraphs, or should you have a whole section of your paper that addresses all of them at once? That is up to you, and you have to do whatever works best for the paper and the argument. What makes the most sense? You don’t want the final paper to feel like you are just checking requirements off a checklist; you want your reader to be so enchanted by the natural flow of the argument that s/he doesn’t notice or think about the fact that this was an assignment.

## Technical Details

Italicize the title *Treasure Island*. (The old standard was to underline book titles, but now that computers will let us italicize, that is preferable.)

Cite page numbers for textual evidence like this (48). If it is a direct quotation, “do it like this” (48). Note the placement of the periods in the preceding sentences.

For those still struggling to find their voices after an hour in the lab. In its simplest form, the skeleton of the paper you write is like this:

Claim: Long John Silver is (not) a typical pirate. (*example*)

Reasons (which will be supported by textual evidence and reasoning):

- 1) He is a killer.
- 2) He is a thief and a manipulator.
- 3) He is cold-hearted, and cares only for his own well being.
- 4) He masterminds the mutiny.
- 5)

Conclusion