Steps Toward a Thesis: General to Specific

1. Pre-writing Notes--VERY GENERAL
   1. You've just finished reading the play, and you spend some time putting some general thoughts, questions and ideas about the play down on paper.
   2. Decide on a general topic of interest for your paper, e.g. The Responsibility of Friar Lawrence for the Deaths of Romeo and Juliet

2. Looking at the Text: Finding Quotations--SPECIFIC
Using index cards, find quotations related to your topic. Write the quotation on one side, with the act, scene, and line number(s) and an explanation of what's going on in the play and why you believe this is important to your topic--really, anything you think is significant to mention.

Example One:
Side One (Blank): "I must upfill this osier cage of ours / With baleful weeds and precious juiced flowers" (2.3.7-8).

(Lined):
A: Literal Level: Here, Friar Lawrence is speaking to himself while he is picking up flowers, just before Romeo comes on stage after having fallen in love with Juliet. In the Friar's basket is poison as well as flowers with pleasant smells and flavors. He recognizes that he is collecting plants that are both hurtful and helpful.

B: Analytical Level: The passage is important for using plants--helpful and hurtful—as a metaphor for the human experience, that humans within them have the capacity for both goodness and evil. Here is an announcement of a major theme in the play, that both people and events have within them a balance of evil and good.

3. Working with Quotations Narrow Your Topic into a Thesis

Look over all your quotes and group them into several specific categories

1. Take one of the more specific ideas and try to limit the topic. Then try to find more quotations or examples to support the limited focus.

2. Group your ideas into sections, thinking carefully about order--chronology, order of importance, influence, types of problems/solutions. Sketch out a simple outline of main topics.
3. Now you will be ready to come up with a THESIS which does the following things for your paper:
   a. interests or provokes the reader; the thesis should be something that might be disputed
   b. is based on a thoughtful reading of the play
   c. demands documentation and further discussion (doesn't make a statement that is perfectly obvious and factual, e.g. Juliet has changed from an innocent girl to an independent girl).
   d. clearly defines the scope of the discussion and is appropriate to the length of your paper.
   e. does not claim to reveal the intent of the author. You can say Shakespeare shows/reveals/suggests/creates but you can't say that Shakespeare "wants to show" since we can't know that.

4. Creating Your Thesis

Your paper should try to say something big about the play. What does Shakespeare appear to be teaching us?

Shakespeare uses __________________________________________ in order to (the big picture)

_______________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

OR

Shakespeare emphasizes (the big picture)

_______________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

Example: Romeo and Juliet, by William Shakespeare, is often called “The greatest love story ever told.” One of the major questions presented in the play is whether Romeo and Juliet are truly in love, or simply infatuated with each other. By examination of the text, it becomes clear that Shakespeare uses the other romantic relationships in the play to show by comparison that Romeo and Juliet are truly in love.
Writing an Outline

A. Bare-Bones Outline (from Romeo and Juliet paper by Alan Reinstein)

I. Intro
   a. Personal account of watching FL on the film
   b. Thesis
      i. Shakespeare uses Friar Lawrence’s opening scene in order to announce
         the balance in nature and humanity of good and evil and in doing so sets
         the friar up as the chief model for such balance.
   c. Map of the essay

II. Body
   a. FL’s introductory speech
      i. Balance right off the bat
      ii. The meaning of the final six lines
   b. His failures
      i. in the story—what vices, crimes is he responsible for
         1. Performs the marriage
         2. He hatches a plan to have Juliet pretend to be dead for forty-two hours
         3. He leaves Juliet in a fragile state, afraid that he might get caught
      ii. In character
         1. fear and weakness
   c. His advice to others comes back to himself
      i. Stumbling
      ii. Wits
   d. His success—how his vice has been “by action dignified
   e. Forgiveness for FL—what is Shakespeare saying
      i. He is a “holy” man
         ii. the friar’s confession: here I stand both to impeach and purge—to confess and to
             cleanse himself

III. Conclusion
B. More Fully-Developed Outline

I. Intro
   a. Personal account of watching FL on the film (“I dare no longer stay)—all his weakness against his visible role of moral and adult authority
   b. Thesis
      i. Shakespeare uses Friar Lawrence’s opening scene to announce the balance in nature and humanity of good and evil and in doing so sets the friar up as the chief model for such balance. He is an agent both of harm and healing, for much of the play unwittingly stumbling in his effort to do good and then, at then end, ironically succeeding in spite of his flaws. Throughout the play, the friar continues to remind the reader of nature’s balance in humans by offering up words of wisdom and advice to which, it becomes clear, the friar neglects to pay attention himself. Finally, his exoneration at the end of the play by the Prince gives the reader a chance to guess at Shakespeare’s meaning of the importance of holiness and having good intentions.
   c. Map of the essay

II. Body
   a. THEME--FL’s introductory speech
      i. Balance right off the bat
      ii. The meaning of the final six lines
         1. the same thing is said twice, in different directions
   b. PLOT—the speech foreshadows the plot
      i. From his good intentions come bad results; from these bad results come a great good
         1. in the story—what vices, crimes is he responsible for
            a. Performs the marriage
               i. He hastily marries the two, even when he is suspicious of Romeo’s love for Juliet—not knowing that this will be a healthy marriage between to people who love each other deeply.
               ii. He marries them in secret
               iii. He exploits the two lovers to bring the feuding families together—unethical to use people so. Friar L will get the credit if the plan works
            b. He hatches a plan to have Juliet pretend to be dead for forty-two hour instead of exposing the situation to the authorities in order to avoid having to marry Juliet to Paris and get in trouble, so afraid he is to get to have to confess.
               i. This plan endangers Juliet since such a concoction must be dangerous
            c. He leaves Juliet in a fragile state, afraid that he might get caught: “I dare no longer stay.”
            d. The lovers deaths bring about the end of the feud
   c. CHARACTER/HUMAN NATURE--His advice to others comes back to himself; the theme of balance of good and evil is represented in his character
      i. fear and weakness
         1. thy noble shape is but a form or wax/digressing from the valor of a man
         2. the noise scared me
         3. trembles, sighs, and weeps
      ii. Stumbling
         1. Stumbling on abuse
         2. Wisely and slow, they stumble that run fast
            a. Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow
         3. How oft tonight have my old feet stumbled at graves
      iii. Wits
         1. Romeo: Wise men have no eyes
            a. O then I see madmen have no ears (like O then I see Queen Mab…)
         2. to Juliet: It strains me past the compass of my wits

III. Conclusion
   a. Forgiveness for FL—what is Shakespeare saying
      i. He is a “holy” man
         1. Juliet recognizes him as such: he hath been tried a holy man
         2. the Prince: We still have known thee for a holy man
      ii. the friar’s confession: here I stand both to impeach and purge—to confess and to cleanse himself
Writing a THESIS STATEMENT—Making a general topic more specific

1. Look over all your quotes and group them into several specific categories.
2. Take one of the more specific ideas and try to limit the topic. Then try to find more quotations or examples to support the limited focus.
3. Group your ideas into sections, thinking carefully about order—chronology, order of importance, influence, types of problems/solutions. Sketch out a simple outline of main topics.
4. Now you will be ready to come up with a THESIS that does the following things for your paper:
   a. interests the reader
   b. is based on a thoughtful reading of the play
   c. demands documentation and further discussion (doesn't make a statement that is perfectly obvious and factual, e.g. Juliet has changed from an innocent girl to an independent girl).
   d. clearly defines the scope of the discussion and is appropriate to the length of your paper.
   e. does not claim to reveal the intent of the author. You can say Shakespeare show/reveals/suggests/creates but you can't say that Shakespeare "wants to show" since we can't know that.

EVALUATING THESE INTRODUCTIONS
Read the following introductions. List the strengths and weaknesses in each paragraph. Then rate them (1 as poor to 5 as excellent). Be ready to defend your ratings in your group. Be ready also to make suggestions to improve each paragraph.

1. At first glance, William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet seems a classic love story, tainted only slightly in its romantic purity by the tragic ending. It seems at first the message is that young love, and even love at first sight, is so substantial that it conquers all, even life. The world of Romeo and Juliet seems euphoric, touching, and almost perfect. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that this is not the author’s message at all. Shakespeare supplies the moral that love has major flaws, and often acts as a destructive force. He uses Mercutio as a primary ambassador of the message that pessimism, disbelief, and irony are the values that keep one in touch with reality.

2. In the famous tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, written by William Shakespeare in the late 1500’s, the two different characters of Romeo and Juliet have a grudge that is so strong that even the servants of each family hate each other. Many characters from each family’s side enter into the conflict. The Nurse, Juliet’s maid, is an important minor character, in the town of Verona. The Nurse, through her conversations and actions to Romeo, Juliet, and other characters of the story, has a very unique personality—on the one hand she is extremely caring and loving to Juliet, but she can also be coarse, vulgar and crude as well as foolish and talkative. Her role in the play is as Juliet’s confidante. Her role in the conflict is her link between Romeo and Juliet. Her main purpose in the play as a whole is her comic relief. The Nurse is an important character because of her distinct personality traits, and her various roles in the plot, conflict, and play as a whole.
3. Think back to childhood. Remember the story of Cinderella, the beautiful girl whose fairy godmother rescued her from their evil stepmother and stepsisters, and helped her win Prince Charming? Now, imagine the story, this time without her fairy godmother, stepsisters or mice and coachmen. Not very interesting—it’s just a girl with an evil stepmother. Or how about *Gone with the Wind*? Imagine this romantic tale by Margaret Mitchell with Mammy, Prissy, Bell Watling, Mrs. Merriweather, and the other minor characters—with just Scarlett and Rhett. It ruins the story, doesn’t it? Without their minor characters, both these stories become flat, boring and lifeless. Now imagine William Shakespeare’s classic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* with only the title characters. Those are the important ones, right? Actually, if one really does a thorough job of imagining, it will become apparent that it is Shakespeare’s witty array of minor characters who enable the story to make us cry and laugh.

4. Almost all of the characters in William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* are faced with a choice between what they want to do and what they should do. During the course of the play, those who choose selfishly are either killed or they lose a family member, while nothing bad happens to those who decide to do what they should. However, in the long run, the selfish decisions that were influenced by love have good results, while those influence by hate or anger lead only to death.

5. In Shakespeare’s play, *Romeo and Juliet*, three minor characters mold the destiny of the two star-crossed lovers. The behaviors of these characters reflect many attitudes and emotions commonly found in family relationships. The nurse, Mercutio, and Friar Lawrence try to positively influence the lives of Romeo and Juliet by giving advice but, as in many family interactions their advice is often misguided. On the surface, Romeo’s and Juliet’s well-being is the priority of these three characters, but in the end their advice and actions appear slightly self-centered and, in turn, create the environment for the tragic ending of the play.
RAPID TRAVEL:
JULIET’S JOURNEY FROM DAUGHTER TO WIFE IN ROME AND JULIET

Love inflicts many emotions on a person that will more often than not affect one’s relationships with others. William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet is a story of change and progression in which Juliet’s relationship with her family, which once consists of a seemingly unbreakable bond, disintegrates throughout the period that she knows and loves Romeo. One’s first impression of Juliet is that of an obedient daughter following her mother’s rules, but as the play continues, her obedience evaporates and leaves a scheming young woman. Shakespeare emphasizes Juliet’s change from loyal daughter to loyal wife by clearly splitting the play into three segments: one demonstrating Juliet’s behavior before meeting Romeo, the next exhibiting her changeover to fully standing by Romeo, and the third displaying ways in which Juliet takes Romeo over her family.

The daughter of an influential family, Juliet lives up to what is expected of her and acquiesces to the requests of her parents in act 1 scene 3, prior to meeting Romeo. Well-mannered and well-educated, her courtesy is shown in her response to her mother’s suggestion of marriage when she replies, “It is an honor that I dream not of” (1.3.66). Before she meets Romeo, even when she declines something from her parents, she does so politely. This politeness stems from the fact that she has nothing to hide — she isn’t in love with an enemy yet — and therefore is free to say what she likes without worrying about slipping up. Although she originally declines her mother’s request, Juliet understands how important it is that a daughter fulfill her mother’s instruction. This changes later on when Juliet ceases to consider how others may react to her actions, but at the moment, she is still an innocent daughter. She agrees, “I’ll look to like if looking liking move; / But no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly” (1.3.97-99). At this point in time, Juliet is completely committed to the duties she owes her family. In this case, it is taking a look at a man her parents have picked out for her. Emphasis is placed on the degree of her obedience, as she not only agrees to take a look at the man, but also promises not to look any more than an amount that pleases her mother. Juliet originally values her family above all else in her life, which makes her evolution to one who treasures her husband above all else even more conspicuous.

Conclusion from “Rapid Travel”

Her journey starts when the play commences, and the audience is introduced to Juliet as a subject of her parents; she will submit to each of their requests and disregard her own feelings. One then has to notice the sharp contrast that arrives as Juliet turns against her nurse for shaming Romeo and continues on to defy her family and
remain devoted to her lover. Juliet goes to extremes, unthought of before she finds what she believes to be true love, that include lying to her family and even bringing about her own death in order to stay dedicated to Romeo. Shakespeare illustrates her journey into love and away from childhood as the play progresses and Juliet grows into her maturity. No matter what the time period, place, or person, love causes numerous changes and has the power to reform one’s relationships with others.

ROMEO’S SPEECH:
THE USE OF OXYMORONS TO INTRODUCE THE THEME OF OPPOSING FORCES

If Romeo were alive today, we know he would be rocking out to Katy Perry’s hit single, “Hot N Cold.” Passionately bobbing his luscious locks up and down while singing the chorus boldly: “Cause you're hot then you're cold/You're yes then you're no/You're in and you're out/You're up and you're down.” Oh, silly Romeo—you and your obsession with oxymorons! A great example of Romeo’s obsession is in his speech to his good friend Benvolio, in which he rants about his feelings after being left heartbroken, rejected by Rosaline, his “love”:

Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate,
O anything, of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health. (1.1.181-5)

Although Romeo might just seem like a crazy heartbroken lover with an odd fixation on oxymorons, there is a deeper meaning behind his words. Shakespeare uses Romeo’s speech to introduce the theme of opposing forces throughout the play. Each pair of oxymorons he mentions is used to introduce an important theme in the play that is essential to the development of the plot and characters. A few of the most important oxymorons he uses are brawling love, heavy lightness, misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms, bright smoke, and sick health. These themes are the basis of Shakespeare’s tale of two lovers, Romeo and Juliet.

Over the course of the play, brawling love becomes one of the most central and significant themes. The Capulets and Montagues, who are “Two households both alike in dignity,/In fair Verona” (Prologue 1-2), have a very bitter rivalry that often results in much fighting and violence. Shakespeare even opens the play with a large brawl between the servants of the Montagues and Capulets in the marketplace of Verona. His glaring eyes witnessing these events, the Prince says,
“Three civil brawls bred of an airy word/By thee, old Capulet, and Montague,/Have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets” (1.1.91-3). In doing this, Shakespeare shows us how often these families are coming into conflict with each other, and what disturbance they cause to all. He reinforces this enmity between the two families later in the play, when an ally of the Montagues, Mercutio, and a kinsman of the Capulets, Tybalt, have a huge fight ending in their premature deaths. Out of all this brawling though, arises the passionate love between Juliet Capulet and Romeo Montague. These “star-crossed lovers” disregard their family’s names and try to overcome the ancient rivalry that moves to separate them. When Juliet meets her love Romeo for the first time, she tells her Nurse and confidant, “My only love sprung from my only hate” (1.5.153). Although Romeo and Juliet are expected to hate each other, a deep love has developed between them instead—a love so strong that it follows them through their hardships and tragedy. The Capulets and Montagues might be brawling rival families, but love, represented by Romeo and Juliet’s relationship, also takes a large presence in the play.

Conclusion from “Romeo’s Use of Oxymorons”

After reading Romeo’s speech in Act I, the reader has a good sense of how the play will develop because each oxymoron he uses relates to a crucial theme in Romeo and Juliet. The themes of brawling love, heavy lightness, misshapen chaos of wellseeming forms, bright smoke, and sick health are all introduced by Romeo in his speech, and take large roles in the play. Shakespeare stresses the use of oxymorons because the central theme of the play is opposing forces. He uses opposing forces to explain that nothing in life is just one dimensional—everything has more than one side to it. When something seems absolutely wonderful, there are also bad aspects to it as well, and vice versa. Nothing is purely black and white—if that were true, we would live in a very boring world. So although today Romeo might seem like an average teenage boy (minus the acne and braces) blocking out his surroundings with his iPod, we know that his powerful experiences lead him to have a much greater understanding of Katy Perry’s song, “Hot N Cold,” than most listeners. Romeo appreciates and understands the value and meaning behind each oxymoron that Katy belts out—so even though this hit song might be just a catchy tune to most, it holds a greater significance to dear Romeo.
PRESENTING QUOTATIONS IN A PAPER

General pattern for quotations in a paragraph

1. Make your point first
2. Present a quotation as evidence for the point you’ve made.
3. Elaborate on the significance of your point to the thesis.

When citing a quotation in from a book that you are doing a paper on, all you need at the end of the quotation is the page number in parentheses: “An’ live of the fatta the land” (14).

1. If the quotation runs **three lines or fewer**, put quotation marks around the quotation and keep it as a part of the paragraph.

   One of the most important themes in *Of Mice and Men* is the importance of dreaming and how dreams for a better life can keep people going when things are looking bad. In the opening section of the novel Lennie begs George to tell him the story of the farm their going to have once they get enough money. Lennie interrupts George with a line from the story he’s clearly heard over and over, when he says, “An’ live offa the fatta the land” (14). [note: the period comes after the parentheses]

2. If the quotation mark runs for **more than three lines**, set it off from your text by beginning a new line, indenting one-half inch from the left margin and one-half inch from the right margin, and keep it double-spaced, without adding quotation marks.

   In *The Catcher in the Rye*, dreams are also important to the main character. In Chapter 22, near the end of the novel, Holden tells his sister what it is he wants to become:

   And I’m standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they’re running and they don’t look where they’re going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. (173)

Here, Holden wants to save children from hurting themselves, to protect them from the dangers of life. [note: in the quotation, the period comes at the end of the sentence, before the parentheses]
(from Mr. Joe Golding)

Quotations: When to use ‘em & how to choose ‘em

When?

While there are many times when a quotation is appropriate, these are three common situations where a quotation might be important.

- Whenever you are making a point that another (reasonable) reader might disagree with
  - EG: Holden is in fact extremely sensitive and thoughtful…

- When the choice of words in the text is significant
  - EG: In describing the girl’s death as “consummation,” Piercy may be trying to…

- When there is a connection between language in different parts of the text
  - EG: For Romeo, night is a time of promise, but when Friar Lawrence says…

How?

UNACCEPTABLE
Romeo tells Juliet that he loves her. “The exchange of your love’s vows for mine” (2.2.75)

WEAK
Romeo tells Juliet he loves her in no uncertain terms: “The exchange of your love’s vows for mine” (2.2.75)

SUAVE
Romeo tells Juliet he loves her in no uncertain terms when he requests “The exchange of your love’s vows for mine” (2.2.75).

MORE SUAVE
When Romeo requests “The exchange of your love’s vows for mine” (2.2.75), he is expressing his love for Juliet in no uncertain terms.

During the balcony scene, when Romeo requests of Juliet “The exchange of your love’s vows for mine” (2.2.75), he is expressing his love for her in no uncertain terms.

How Much?

As a general rule, be frugal. Use only what you need. If you are not going to discuss the actual words in the quotation, you do not generally need them.

PS: “Quote” is an action. “Quotation” is a noun. You should not write about “a quote.”
In addition to weaknesses, epic heroes like Odysseus have strengths. One of Odysseus’s strengths is that he’s courageous, and one example of Odysseus being courageous occurs in Book 10, when the ship is docked at the Island of Circe. When Circe captures half of Odysseus’s men, our epic hero single-handedly goes to get them back. He tells Eurylochus—who is afraid and tells Odysseus, “Don’t force me to go back there. Leave me here” (10.286)—that he will go save his men. “I’m going,” he tells his top soldier, “We’re in a really tight spot” (10.290), proving that he is very brave. Eurylochus doesn’t want to go, but Odysseus chooses to go, showing that Odysseus is different from most men. He knows he could be harmed when he is at the house of Circe, but he is courageous and doesn’t fear her, and later gets back all his men. This is the truest example of epic courage, to face fears and challenges head on when others beside you are unwilling to.

Jane's touches have an ironic effect on Holden. It is a beautiful thing the way he gets excited over such simplicity, because when it often takes much more to impress him, this wonderful, “muckle-mouthed” (79) creature stimulates him just by contact of the nerves at the tips of her fingers. Holden reminisces on the time that he “felt this hand on the back of [his] neck, and it was Jane's” (79-80), with more affection in his voice than when he discusses the several moments during which he says he just missed have sexual intercourse. While it is acknowledged that he feels for others in the pure and youthful community, subtle interactions with Jane fulfill Holden's own desires to be the same. In this situation at least, he is not edging towards hypocrisy. Sweet to children, he wishes for a kind of sweetness himself. When so many girls linger within his reach he can't stop thinking about the one girl that makes him want to slow down and stick with her hands for a while. He says, “That doesn't sound like much, I realize, but she was terrific to hold hands with” (79). He denies its importance out of a reluctance to admit that it means so much more to him. Holden may be tempted by sex. There is all the evidence that someday he wants to do it regularly, but, at least for now, it's almost as if he's mothering himself, slowing himself down, preserving his own innocence.
VIRTUE MISAPPLIED AND ACTION DIGNIFIED:
FRIAR LAWRENCE AS A MODEL FOR COMPLIMENTARY OPPOSITES
IN ROMEO AND JULIET

by

Alan Reinstein

May 1, 2009
English 210—Literature and World History
Mr. Reinstein