

Using Character Transformation in Essay Writing

One effective way to approach writing a literary exploration essay is to focus on how a character transforms (or changes) in relationship to the essay question.

Here I will take you through the process of using transformation to structure a literary exploration essay on the diploma exam. Let's begin by writing a thesis statement. The five steps on the following pages will guide you through the creation of an effective thesis.

1 Reread the Essay Question:

Example Question:

What is your opinion of the idea that our beliefs are influenced by the actions of others?



2 Decode the question.

- Cross off the stem of the question to focus on what it's asking.
- Then circle the keywords.

Original Question: What is your opinion of the idea that our beliefs are influenced by the actions of others?

Example of Decoding Question:

~~What is your opinion of the idea that our~~ beliefs are influenced by the actions of others



3 Rephrase the original question into a simple answer.

Original Question: What is your opinion of the idea that our beliefs are influenced by the actions of others?

Example of Rephrasing Question: Other people can influence our beliefs.



4

Choose a character who transforms.

Choose a character from a text you have studied in the course. Explain how you could use that character's transformation to answer the essay question.

Original Question:

What is your opinion of the idea that our beliefs are influenced by the actions of others?

Here's how transformation could be used to answer the question:

Wes Holman from the short story "Long, Long After School" could be used to answer the question because **Mrs. Tretheway causes Wes to transform**. Her **actions** toward him **influenced** the way he thought about himself and helped him **transform** into a strong student who felt worthy of love.



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Write your thesis using a "because" or "but" clause. Then plug it into the thesis statement formula.

Name the type of text (photo, novel, film, etc.), the title, and the author or text creator.

- Titles of longer texts should be italicized or underlined.
- Titles of shorter texts should be in "quotation marks."

Formula: In [type of text], [text title], [poet/photographer/filmmaker/etc.] suggests that [thesis statement].

Original Question: What is your opinion of the idea that our beliefs are influenced by the actions of others?

Thesis:

In the short story "Long, Long After School," author Ernest Buckler suggests that other people's actions can influence or transform our beliefs because they can inspire us to see the best in ourselves.

More Examples of Thesis Statements Using Transformation

Here are a few additional examples of how you can use the concept of character transformation to respond to a diploma exam essay question, following the five steps you just learned.

All of these questions have been taken from previous diploma exams.

To see more sample diploma questions and sample student responses, go to this link on the Alberta Education Website: <https://education.alberta.ca/admin/testing/diplomaexams/examples.aspx>

Example #1

Sample Essay Question:

What is your opinion of the idea that courage is an important quality?



Thesis Statement:

In the short story, “Garson,” author Wayson Choy suggests that courage is an important quality **because** without it, an individual can be transformed into someone he’s ashamed to be.

More Examples of Thesis Statements Using Transformation

Example #2

Sample Essay Question:

What is your opinion of the idea that a moment of crisis can have significant consequences?

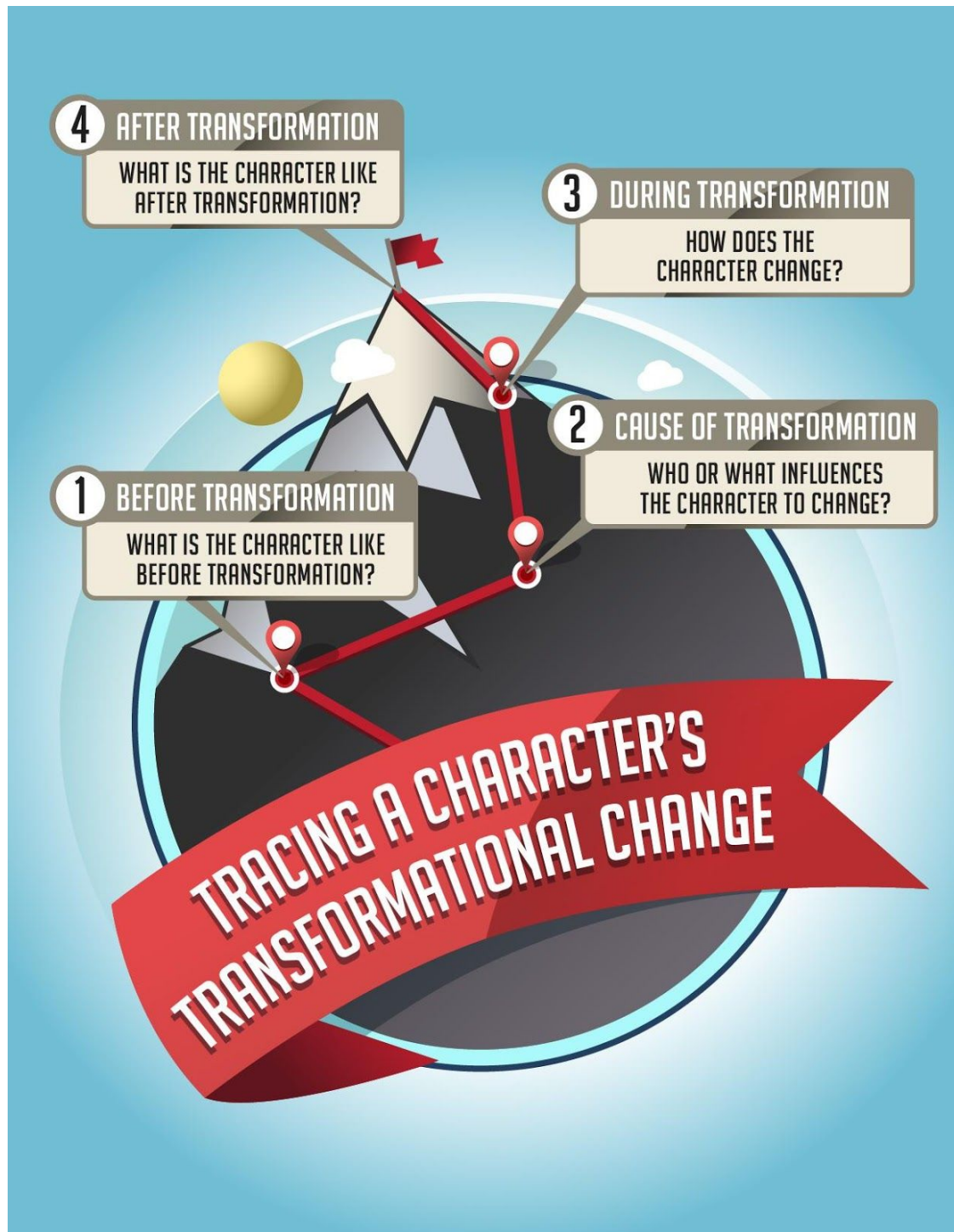


Thesis Statement:

In the film, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, director Ben Stiller suggests that a moment of crisis can have significant consequences **because** it can force someone to transform his or her life in order to survive.

Organizing Your Essay around Transformation

Once you have written your thesis statement incorporating the concept of transformation, you will want to create a plan for organizing your essay. Focusing on one stage of the character's transformation in **each body paragraph** is a great option for organization.



Organizing Your Essay around Transformation

Once you have an idea about how to structure your essay around the character's transformation, you should do some planning before you begin to write your essay, so you know which details you will include in each paragraph of your response.

Here is a quick guide that will help you plan your response to most essay topics. Just focus on how the character(s) transform(s), and remember the words in **red**. They will help you organize your response.

Introductory Paragraph: **Introduce**

- Introduce the topic. Use a quotation from the excerpt or a brief anecdote (could be a personal one) that relates the topic to your own life to get the reader's attention.
- Introduce the text(s) and character(s) you will discuss. Include the author(s). Remember, you have to refer to a text from the course, but you have the option of also referring to the excerpt given to you on the exam.
- In a single thesis statement, answer the assigned question so it is clear what you will prove in your essay, and include a "because" or "but" clause. For example: Being able to face hardship is an essential human quality, **because** it helps us understand who we really are.

Body Paragraph 1: **Before Transformation**

- State the topic sentence. Be sure it relates to the thesis statement and clearly focusses on the character **prior** to transformation.
- Introduce the character, and explain that character's role in the text.
- Describe the character at the beginning of the story, before he or she transforms.
- Discuss specific examples from the text that support your point, always showing how the evidence proves the thesis. Warning: **Avoid simply summarizing the plot! A plot summary will earn you an INSUFFICIENT in the Thought and Detail category of your diploma exam.** (That's a ZERO in the category worth 10% of your total exam mark.)
- Always relate the evidence back to the thesis.

Body Paragraph 2: **Cause of Transformation**

- State the topic sentence. Be sure it relates to the thesis statement and clearly focusses on the **cause** of the character's transformation.
- Explain the circumstances that cause the character's transformation to begin.
- Describe how the character initially reacts.

- Support your ideas with examples from the text that show the causes of transformation, always showing how the evidence proves the thesis.
- Always relate the evidence back to the thesis.

Body Paragraph 3: **During Transformation**

- State the topic sentence. Be sure it relates to the thesis statement and clearly focusses on the character **during** the process of transformation.
- Describe how the character is changing as seen in key moments in the text. Support your ideas with specific evidence, always showing how the evidence proves the thesis.
- Consider the way in which the character has to make a choice between an old and new way of thinking or behaving.
- Always relate the evidence back to the thesis.

Body Paragraph 4: **After Transformation**

- State the topic sentence. Be sure it relates to the thesis statement and clearly focusses on the character **after** transformation.
- Describe how the character has changed. Explain the outcome of the transformation—who the character “is” at the end of the text.
- How does this transformation process affect those around him or her?
- Why does his or her transformation matter?
- Support your ideas with specific evidence from the text that the character has transformed in an important way.
- Always relate the evidence back to the thesis.

Concluding Paragraph: **Conclude**

- Restate your thesis statement in different words.
- Reconnect with your introductory paragraph:
 - How has your character helped you to explore the topic?
 - How does this discussion connect with the excerpt from the text or your personal experience (only if you referred to them earlier in your essay)
 - What have you discovered about the topic? How does it relate to people in society?
- Include final words to leave the reader thinking: a quotation, an anecdote, or a strong statement or question.