**Hamlet Essay**

For this essay, you will write a 1000 word paper, in MLA format, focused on an aspect of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. You will not conduct research for this essay, but rather, you are expected to compose an original thesis and defend your argument through the analysis of carefully selected quotes from the play that support your claim. The topics listed below are to help you in finding your focus. You are also welcome to write about any topic of your choosing if none of these appeals to you.

1. Why does Hamlet delay before taking his revenge? Devise a well-structured argument to account for his postponement of action, despite his initial declaration that he will swiftly “sweep to his revenge.”

2. Hamlet’s true feelings for Ophelia are clouded by ambiguity. Is he really in love with her, or simply half-heartedly toying with her, as implied by Polonius and Leartes? Write a concise essay exploring one of these two positions.

3. Poison is a pervasive symbol in Hamlet. How does the notion of poison amplify as the play progresses? What is the symbolism of the poison being poured into Old Hamlet’s ear? What could poison represent, and how might it advance the theme of corruption? Is there a relationship between poison and speech?

4. Throughout Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, there are key references to silence and speech, culminating in Hamlet’s last words before he dies. Track how these two modes are employed throughout the play, and discuss their significance to the play as a whole.

5. It is possible to say that Laertes, Horatio and Fortinbras are mirrors held up to Hamlet’s nature. Discuss the similarities and differences between the prince of Denmark and his counterparts, and how they ultimately inform his nature.

6. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a self-reflexive play. This means that it self-consciously refers to the workings of the theater, drawing the audience's attention to the fact that the play is a theatrical production while they watch a theatrical production. Analyze elements of self-reflexivity and discuss how they contribute to the overall meaning of the play.

7. Hamlet is a play in which nothing can be taken at face value: appearances are frequently deceptive, and many characters engage in play-acting, spying and pretense. What deliberate attempts are made at deception? Are the intended audiences deceived? While some deceptions are perpetrated in order to conceal secrets, others aim to uncover hidden truths. Which are which? To what extent are they successful? Note references to appearances, disguises, pretense, seeming, masks, acting, etc. Discuss the importance of deception in the play.

8. Hamlet initially questions whether the ghost of his father is what it appears to be. Are the ghost’s intentions good or evil? Is it really the ghost of his father, or an evil demon in disguise? The question is never clearly answered through the course of the play. Drawing from textual evidence, develop an argument that support one of these two possible conceptions of the ghost.

9. Like Hamlet, Laertes is a son confronted with a father's death. To what extent does he function as a foil to Hamlet? What do they have in common? How do they differ? Develop an argument that explores the relationship between these counterparts and how they affect the reader/audience’s perception of Hamlet.

10. Hamlet’s nature as a philosophical, deep thinker provides both rich language and interesting ideas throughout the play. Explore Shakespeare’s view of humanity as seen through Hamlet.

11. Analyze the use of comedy in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Does comedy serve merely to relieve the tension of the tragedy, or do the comic scenes serve a more serious thematic purpose as well?

12. Discuss Hamlet's treatment of and ideas about women. How might these help to clarify some of the interpretative issues of the play? You might want to consider carefully the way he talks about sexuality. He treats Ophelia and Gertrude harshly in certain scenes but for quite different reasons. Explain his motives in each case.

13. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* participates in an Elizabethan genre known as a revenge play. Describe some elements of the classic revenge tragedy. Does *Hamlet* fulfill all the elements of a revenge tragedy? How does Hamlet's attitude toward revenge change throughout the play? When does he talk about revenge? How does what he says about revenge match what he actually does?

14. At the end of Act 1, Hamlet informs his friends that he will be feigning madness. As the play progresses, it becomes difficult to tell whether he is really losing his mind, or simply putting on an act to sow confusion and cast off suspicion. Using textual evidence, write a concise essay defending one of these two possibilities.

Essay Rubric

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| **Categories** | **Level 1**  **(50-59%)** | **Level 2**  **(60-69%)** | **Level 3**  **(70-79%)** | **Level 4**  **(80-100%)** |
| **Knowledge & Understanding**  understanding, analysis, explanation of the writing task, themes, concepts, and ideas. | Demonstrates limited knowledge and understanding of content | Demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of content | Demonstrates considerable knowledge and understanding of content | Demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of content |
| **Thinking**  Establishes a clear thesis, maintains direction, focus and coherence; considers perspectives of the reader, author, and context | Uses planning and processing skills with limited effectiveness | Uses planning and processing skills with some effectiveness | Uses planning and processing skills with considerable effectiveness | Uses planning and processing skills with a high degree of effectiveness |
| **Communication**  Extent to which ideas are elaborated using specific and relevant details and/or evidence to support the thesis; critical thinking skills are employed | Expresses, organizes, and communicates ideas with limited effectiveness | Expresses, organizes, and communicates ideas with some effectiveness | Expresses, organizes, and communicates ideas with considerable effectiveness | Expresses, organizes, and communicates ideas with a high degree of effectiveness |
| **Application**  Writing reveals proper MLA format, formal academic writing conventions: spelling, punctuation, grammar, paragraphing, capitalization, and word usage | Applies writing conventions and referencing with limited effectiveness | Applies writing conventions and referencing with some effectiveness | Applies writing conventions and referencing with considerable effectiveness | Applies writing conventions and referencing with a high degree of effectiveness |