

Stay Focused on your Topic

by minimizing passages of summary

Don't do this:

Although Macbeth becomes a ruthless leader, near the end of the play, Shakespeare includes just enough positive qualities in Macbeth to make him a tragic hero. Malcolm and Macduff leave England to wage war on Macbeth. Their armies are growing in strength since Macbeth's soldiers are deserting him. A servant comes in and tells Macbeth that there are ten thousand soldiers outside his castle. Although this makes Macbeth angry, he stays confident and continues the battle saying, "Come, wrack! At least we'll die with harness on our back." (5, 5, 56-57) ...

Discuss with a partner:

1. What are some of the strengths of this passage?
2. What needs to be improved?

Now, let's take a closer look at this passage:

Although Macbeth becomes a ruthless leader, near the end of the play, Shakespeare includes just enough positive qualities in Macbeth to make him a tragic hero. The topic sentence clearly introduces the point that will be proven in the paragraph, so the writer has started off on the right track, but then something weird happens in the next sentence... **Malcolm and Macduff leave England to wage war on Macbeth.** Wait a minute, I thought this paragraph was about Macbeth? Why am I reading about Malcolm and Macduff? But wait, there's more... **Their armies are growing in strength since Macbeth's soldiers are deserting him.** Okay, I'm confused. How does this prove Macbeth is heroic? If anything, this proves the opposite - that Macbeth is a weak leader who can't maintain control of his own subjects. Now, notice how the passage gets way off topic... **A servant comes in and tells Macbeth that there are ten thousand soldiers outside his castle...** Yes, I know, I read the play too, and now, the writer has drifted so far from the topic that my tiny attention span forgot what the topic actually is. Finally, the writer gets to the point: **Although this makes Macbeth angry, he stays confident and continues the battle saying, "Come, wrack! At least we'll die with harness on our back." (5, 5, 56-57)** Great quote! Great lead-in to the quote! But, because this is part of a summary, the reader may not readily see that the writer is trying to convey that Macbeth is brave enough to put up a good fight even though he knows he will be slaughtered... big time, and this is a heroic quality.

So how can the writer fix this?

Although Macbeth becomes a ruthless leader, near the end of the play, Shakespeare includes just enough positive qualities in Macbeth to make him a tragic hero. ~~Malcolm and Macduff leave England to wage war on Macbeth. Their armies are growing in strength since Macbeth's soldiers are deserting him. The servant comes in and tells Macbeth that there are ten thousand soldiers outside his castle.~~ Macbeth shows true bravery when Malcolm and Macduff's armies are about to attack. Even though he is greatly out-numbered and his defeat is imminent, he still chooses to fight rather than retreat. He shows he is willing to die for his honour when he valiantly declares, "Come, wrack! At least we'll die with harness on our back," indicating that he's willing to die for his honour. (5, 5, 56-57)

Notice that the underlined portion is a condensed version of the summary found in the first draft. However, in the second draft, the writer included it in the evidence so that every sentence is about Macbeth's heroic nature rather than Malcolm's army.

Draft #3 — A little bit more fine tuning:

Although Macbeth becomes a ruthless, sadistic leader, near the end of the play, Shakespeare includes just enough positive qualities in Macbeth to make him a tragic hero. Macbeth shows true bravery when Malcolm and Macduff's armies are about to attack. Even though he is greatly out-numbered and his defeat is imminent, he still chooses to fight rather than retreat. He shows he is willing to die for his honour when he valiantly declares, "Come, wrack! At least we'll die with harness on our back." (5, 5, 56-57)

In the space below, add two more examples to this paragraph. Make sure you end with a concluding sentence.
