(3) to refer to literary conventions or expectations, and (4) to argue against possible objections. You might combine these. Thus, if we assume that your argument is that Hamlet's delay is reasonable, you might first consider the word *delay* (strategy 2). Then you might use strategy 1 to explain the reasons for Hamlet's delay. Finally, to answer objections to your argument, you might show that Hamlet acts promptly when he believes he is justified (strategy 4). Whatever your topic, the important thing is to use the method or methods that best help you make a good argument for your solution.

In your conclusion, try to affirm the validity of your solution in view of the supporting evidence. You might do this by reemphasizing your strongest points, or you might simply present a brief summary. Or you might think of your argument as still continuing and thus use the strategy of procatalepsis or anticipation to raise and answer possible objections to your solution, as in the last paragraph of the following illustrative essay.

Illustrative Student Essay

Although underlined sentences are not recommended by MLA style, they are used in this illustrative essay as teaching tools to emphasize the central idea, thesis sentence, and topic sentences.

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Professor Tomaiuolo
English 312
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The Problem of Hamlet's Apparent Delay°

[1] Many readers and spectators of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* have been puzzled by the prince's apparent failure to kill Claudius quickly. Early in the play, the Ghost calls on his son to "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.25). Hamlet, however, delays his vengeance until the end of the play. The problem results from why does he not act sooner. The answer is that there is no unjustified delay and that in fact Hamlet acts as quickly as possible.* This becomes evident

°This play appears on pages 1355–1452.
*Central idea.

†Thesis sente

when we examine the conventions of revenge tragedy, the actual "call to revenge," and the steps that Hamlet takes to achieve vengeance.†

Revenge tragedy obviously requires that vengeance be delayed until the closing moments of the play. Given this limitation, Shakespeare must justify the wide gap of time between the call to revenge in Act 1 and the killing of Claudius in Act 5. We find such justification in the unreliability of the ghost's initial accusation, Hamlet's need for additional evidence, and the events that occur after this evidence is obtained. [2]

The Ghost's accusations and demands are straightforward: he accuses his brother of murdering him and he calls on his son for vengeance. Shakespeare is careful, however, to establish that this testimony is doubtful. Horatio questions the Ghost's truthfulness and motives, and he warns Hamlet that the spirit might "assume some other horrible form / Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason, / And draw you into madness" (1.4.73–75). Hamlet himself expresses doubt about the ghost: [3]

> The spirit that I have seen
> May be a devil, and the devil hath power
> T'assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps
> Out of my weakness, and my melancholy,
> As he is very potent with such spirits,
> Abuses me to damn me; I'll have grounds
> More relative than this. (2.2.573–79)

The prince thus cannot act on the unsupported word of the Ghost; he needs more evidence.

There is no delay at this point in the play, because Hamlet quickly begins developing a plan of action. Immediately after speaking with the Ghost, he decides to cover himself under an "antic disposition" while he gathers information. He swears his companions to silence and warns them not to react knowingly if he should seem to behave strangely or insanely [4]

†Thesis sentence.

(1.5.169–79). His idea is that this pose will make him less a subject of suspicion and will therefore make others less careful.

[5] Once Hamlet has begun his plan, he takes advantage of every opportunity to carry out his vengeance. When the players come to Elsinore, he adroitly plans to test Claudius by making him publicly view a play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, which shows a murder just like Claudius's murder of Hamlet's father. Hamlet states that Claudius's appearance will give him the clue he needs to confirm the Ghost's information.

> I'll observe his looks,
> I'll tent him to the quick, if a' do blench
> I know my course. (2.2.571–573)

Once the king breaks up the performance in great agitation, which Hamlet correctly interprets as an admission of guilt, Hamlet declares confidence in the Ghost ("I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound" [3.2.271–272]). Moreover, he is psychologically ready to act against the king, for he asserts that he could "drink hot blood, / And do such bitter business as the day / Would quake to look on" (3.2.367–369). Without doubt, Hamlet is only a prayer away from stabbing Claudius, for when he sees the king kneeling, his opportunity has merged with his desire and also with his promise to the Ghost. He tells the audience, "Now might I do it pat, now a' is a-praying, / And now I'll do't" (3.3.73–74).

[6] But he does not "do't," and for this reason he is open to the accusation that he cannot act. Again, however, Shakespeare carefully justifies this hesitation. The prince does not want to send Claudius's soul to heaven by killing him at prayer. This reason is not simply an excuse for delay. Rather, Hamlet wants his revenge to match Claudius's treacherous murder of the previous King Hamlet, who died without the chance to pray and repent:

> Up sword, and know thou a more horrid hent,
> When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
> Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,
> At game, a-swearing, or about some act
> That has no relish of salvation in't,
> Then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven,

> And that his soul may be as damned and black
> As hell whereto it goes. (3.3.88–95)

This deferral is in keeping with the code of personal blood vengeance, whereby the revenge must match or exceed the original crime. There is no question of Hamlet's incapacity to act, because his putting up his sword is reasonable and justifiable.

From this point on, Hamlet acts or reacts to every situation as the opportunity presents itself. After he kills Polonius, Claudius initiates a counterplot to send Hamlet off to England and execution. Clearly, Hamlet's chances to kill the king are thus reduced to zero. It is not until Act 5 that Hamlet gets back to Denmark, after having decisively thwarted Claudius's murderous instructions by turning them against Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He makes it clear to Horatio, however, that he will take the earliest opportunity, and that "the readiness is all" (5.2.205). Once the rigged fencing match is under way, the opportunity finally comes. Claudius, Hamlet learns, has not only killed his father but has poisoned his mother, and he himself is about to die from Laertes's poisoned sword. Upon such certain information, Hamlet immediately kills Claudius. When the revenge is complete, the Ghost, who began the cry for vengeance, is nowhere to be heard or seen, and four bodies lie on the stage. [7]

Thus, we see that the issue of Hamlet's delay—and the vengeance does take four acts to carry out—is really not a problem. The prince acts in accordance with the code of revenge as quickly as circumstances permit. Although the text of the play supports this solution, critics might still argue that procrastination is an issue because Hamlet twice accuses himself of delay. This objection does not take into consideration that Hamlet's perception of time and action is distorted by his eagerness for vengeance. From Hamlet's subjective point of view, any break in activity is delay. From our objective viewpoint, however, delay is not a true problem. [8]

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Work Cited

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*. Ed. Edgar V. Roberts and Robert Zweig. 10th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2012. 1355–1452. Print.

Commentary on the Essay

The structure of the essay illustrates strategy 1 (p. 1519). Paragraph 2, however, makes brief use of strategy 3 in its reference to the conventions of revenge tragedy. In both paragraphs 6 and 8, the argument is carried on by use of *procatalepsis*, or strategy 4, whereby a counterargument is raised and then answered.

The introductory paragraph raises the problem of Hamlet's apparent delay and offers a brief statement of the solution (the central idea). This plan is developed in paragraphs 2–7 in exactly the same order in which the issues are raised in the introduction. Paragraph 2 deals with the meaning and requirements of revenge, and paragraph 3 takes up the issue of the Ghost's reliability. Paragraphs 4 and 5 deal with Hamlet's attempts to corroborate the Ghost's accusations, and paragraphs 6 and 7 consider the subsequent action. Note that each paragraph in the argument grows naturally out of the one that precedes it, just as all the paragraphs are linked to the introductory paragraph.

The concluding paragraph asserts that the original problem is solved; the paragraph then summarizes the steps of the solution. It also continues the argument by raising and then dealing with a possible objection.

Writing Topics About Tragedy

Writing Paragraphs

1. In a paragraph develop an argument for one of these assertions.
   a. Oedipus's fall is the result of fate, predestination, and the gods, and it would happen no matter what kind of person he is.
   b. Oedipus's fall is the result only of his character and has nothing to do with fate or the gods.

Writing Essays

1. Much has been made of the contrast in *Oedipus the King* between vision and blindness. Write an essay that considers this contrast as it is related to the character of Oedipus. How are blindness and seeing reversed, with regard to his understanding about the curse on the city, his attempts to ferret out the