

The components of the IOC

The main components of the IOC are:

- Introduction (explaining the central argument)
- Main body
- Conclusion

Let's take the famous poem "The Tyger" by William Blake (from *Songs of Experience*, 1794):

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright In the forests of the night, What immortal hand or eye Could frame thy fearful symmetry?	
In what distant deeps or skies Burnt the fire of thine eyes? On what wings dare he aspire? What the hand dare sieze the fire?	5
And what shoulder, & what art Could twist the sinews of thy heart? And when thy heart began to beat, What dread hand? & what dread feet?	10
What the hammer? what the chain? In what furnace was thy brain? What the anvil? what dread grasp Dare its deadly terrors clasp?	15
When the stars threw down their spears, And watered heaven with their tears, Did he smile his work to see? Did he who made the Lamb make thee?	20
Tyger! Tyger! burning bright In the forests of the night, What immortal hand or eye Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?	

Now we will look at how we can analyze this poem using the three components outlined above.

Introduction

The introduction should contain three clear elements:

1. Identification of the extract or poem, e.g. "The poem "The Tyger" by William Blake is a vivid and atmospheric account of a tiger that asks questions of how and by whom the creature was created.' This should not take you more than 30 seconds or so – a statement or two will do.
2. Statement of your argument: 'This commentary will investigate the idea that the devil is ultimately the creator of the tiger ...'
3. An indication of how your commentary is going to proceed: '... through an analysis of the use of rhetorical questions, imagery, rhythm and symbolism.'

In total, your introduction should not last more than a minute or so.

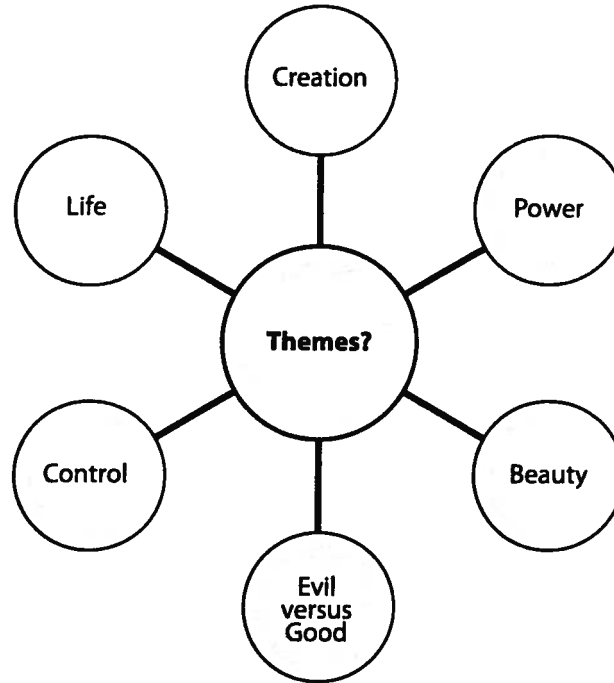
The argument

The *argument*, also called a *thesis statement* or a *statement of intent*, should be clear and concise. You are expected to remain within the logic of this argument throughout the main body of your commentary, coming back to it frequently and quoting extracts from the passage or poem that illustrate it appropriately. Finding an argument can be difficult, and to do so you will need to read through the poem or extract a few times, highlighting and annotating before you can write up a good plan.

Brainstorming an argument during the 20 minutes' preparation:

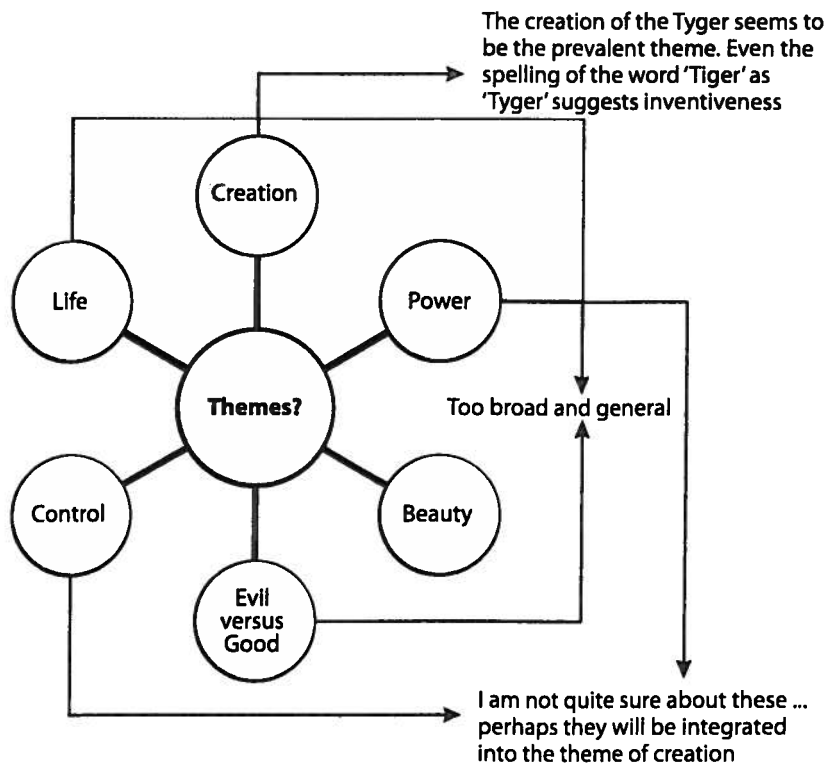
Step 1

Read through the poem and write down all of the possible themes you think the poem evokes. In considering 'The Tyger', for instance, we could come up with these themes:



Step 2

Select the theme that expresses what the poem is saying the most accurately and the one you can say the most about. This is how you might proceed:



Step 3

Once you have chosen a theme, look through the poem or extract again, highlighting where and when you see the theme coming up. Try to synthesize all of the examples of this theme that you can find into one statement.

Step 4

See if your argument holds (in other words, now read through the poem with that argument in mind to see if you agree that this is what the poem or extract is saying).

This is what you might have come up with at this point: 'The poem "The Tyger" by William Blake is a vivid and atmospheric account of a tiger that asks questions of how and by whom the creature was created. This commentary will investigate the idea that the devil is ultimately the creator of the tiger.'

You need to think about the writer's choices and make them part of the main thrust of your commentary. This means looking for literary techniques and deciding how you can analyze them in the light of your argument. Coming back to the poem we might look to the following:

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

Clear rhyme scheme (rhyming couplets) creates a strong mesmerizing rhythm

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare sieze the fire?

Symbolism of the divine or some sort of cosmic force (skies, the sacred fire)

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

Rhetorical questions: the crux of the matter

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

Powerful and evocative imagery to suggest (albeit through the question) that the devil made the Tyger

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Repetition: the poet comes back to the first stanza to enforce the idea of a cyclical, mesmerizing and ongoing force

This brings us back to our argument. We can take these techniques as the THROUGH part of the argument:

The poem 'The Tyger' by William Blake is a vivid and atmospheric account of a tiger that asks questions of how and by whom the creature was created. **Through an analysis of the use of rhetorical questions, imagery, rhythm and symbolism**, this commentary will investigate the idea that the devil is ultimately the creator of the tiger.

The main body

Whereas the introduction is brief and synthetic, the main body is detailed, demonstrative (you are demonstrating your points) and well illustrated. It's important to take the points you have outlined in your introduction and to develop them fully in the course of the main body and not to merely state facts or make observations. The main body of your commentary will take up the bulk of your talk time, about ten minutes.

The relationship between the introduction and the main body should be tight. For example:

First point of the main body: how the rhetorical questions reinforce the fundamental inquiry of who made the tiger.

Second point: examples of strong imagery will be used to show how a cosmic atmosphere, a stage for the gods, is created, suggesting that some sort of transcendent force must have created the tiger.

Third point: an analysis of the way that the rhythm contributes to the meaning of the poem. The mesmerizing rhyme scheme and repetition give the reader the impression that there is an inexorable process at work, that the creation of the tiger is something that takes place in an eternal cycle of creation and destruction. This aspect could link with the second part of the commentary.

Last point: reflects on the use of symbolism in the poem, and how the pagan symbols of Promethean 'fire', 'wings' (Icarus), 'anvil' and 'furnace' (Hephaistos) and the dark forest point to a daemonic presence being responsible for the creation of the tiger. More orthodox Christian symbolism of good – 'the Lamb', 'heaven' and 'the stars' – suggests that God made the tiger.

The conclusion

The conclusion of your oral commentary should not be a simple repetition of your introduction or a re-stating of the main body, but a summation of your principal findings. You should remind the listener how your argument has been demonstrated. You might be able to synthesize the author's choices (use of literary techniques) into some sort of pattern.

It is good to end with a strong sentence about the universal significance of the text, to show some deeper understanding of its place as a great piece of literature. For example, using the example of the commentary on 'The Tyger' that we have suggested, a good conclusion might go something like this:

In conclusion, William Blake's 'The Tyger' makes use of poetic techniques to reinforce the eternal philosophical question of the creation of evil. Whilst the rhythm and rhyme suggest, by their highly musical and cyclical pattern, that we will never find an answer to this question, the imagery and symbolism outline the two sides of the argument that such a creature could only have been created by evil on the one hand, or by a force as large as God on the other. One of the reasons that this poem has stood the test of time and is still a relevant and powerful piece of literature today is because of its infectious musicality, but also its thought-provoking subject matter.