I would strongly recommend structuring every paper like an essay with at least 3 paragraphs: intro, one or more body paragraphs, and a brief conclusion.

PARAGRAPH #1: INTRODUCTION

Step 1: Introduce the text’s author, title, and topic. (Think of this step as introducing WHAT the paper is about. But do not announce it or ever mentioning “I” or writing the paper.) For example: Shirley Jackson’s story “The Lottery” presents the reader with a bleak commentary on human nature.

Step 2: Provide relevant and necessary background or context and narrow the focus, leading to the claim without giving the claim away. (Think of this step as focusing on HOW you will approach the topic, looking at what characters, literary devices, etc.) For example: The story is told with an omniscient third person point of view, locating the reader outside the events looking in seemingly from a distance but ultimately really from the point of view of the villagers. . . . Etc.

Step 3: Introduce the claim (thesis). The claim is the main argument of the entire paper and should focus on just one idea the rest of the paper will prove and develop. (Think of this step as WHY you are writing this paper, its purpose.) For example: Ultimately, Jackson’s story holds up a mirror to the readers, compelling us to see ourselves in the villagers.

Note: Do not list your reasons (point or topic sentences) in the claim. The claim is one sentence and the final sentence of Paragraph #1.

BODY PARAGRAPHS:

Note: Place transitions at the beginning of the body paragraph. Transitions should indicate how the new reason (idea/argument) will relate to the reason from the previous paragraph, whether the new idea is similar, additional, contrasting, etc. The transition could be its own sentence that comes before the reason of this paragraph, but more likely it will be part of the sentence that presents the reason. Looking at the example of a reason below, we can see that the first part of the sentence—Besides placing the reader physically or perceptually on the outside looking in—is the transition.

Step 1: Present the reason (the focusing argument of the paragraph). This argument should be different from the claim but of course must relate to it however loosely. Like the claim, it will present just one idea. For example: Besides placing the reader physically or perceptually on the outside looking in, the story also keeps us emotionally detached from the characters.

Step 2: Supports the reason with evidence, including general and specific examples, details, including correctly formatted and integrated quotations and your interpretation/analysis of them. The claim and reasons TELL; quotations should SHOW and your explanation pointing out what they show and especially how/why they prove the reason. For example: We take notice of Tessie; after all, she comes late, drawing unnecessary attention to herself not only with her arrival but also with her seemingly insincere claim that she “[c]lean forgot what day it was” (965). But while she is singled out for attention, we do not gain any insight into her character, and lacking that insight, we also fail to make an emotional connection with her, remaining at best indifferent. Etc.

Step 3: Explains how the reason proves and develops the claim. The claim is not static. Every paragraph should add to or change its meaning and help to explain its importance. For example: By keeping us emotionally distant from Tessie, we become like the villagers, sharing their casual and indifferent view of each other made necessary by the brutal act they anticipate perpetrating on the selected victim. Etc.

Note: Just saying “this shows that we are meant to identify with the villagers” is vague and doesn’t in fact show or prove anything or develop anything.
CONCLUSION:

The paper is not complete without a conclusion.

**Step 1:** Remind us of the claim, but do not just copy/paste the same sentence. For example: By compelling us to identify with the villagers, Jackson is revealing her purpose, which is dependent upon us to fulfill.

**Step 2:** Develop the claim. (Think of this step as asking yourself and answering the question SO WHAT? Consider the implications, importance, and purpose of this argument.) For example: It is clear the villagers have not changed. Only Tessie undergoes a change, which comes too late for the villagers to hear. But we do hear it. . . . Etc.

**Step 3:** Draw the paper to a close. End with a strong last sentence and word.

**Note:** Do not repeat the reasons or evidence in the conclusion.