

Emma

Sample Analytical Paper Topics

The following paper topics are based on the entire novel. Following each topic is an outline to help get you started.

TOPIC #1

Historians tell us that the novel takes place in a period of rigid class distinctions in which manners, not results, are the standard by which everyone is judged. Jane Austen derives the comedy in her novel *Emma* from the manners and customs of the classes she portrays.

Outline

- I. Thesis Statement:** *Jane Austen's Emma pokes fun at class distinctions.*
- II. Manners of the landed gentry**
 - A. Emma's well-bred manners contrasted with her ill-mannered scheming
 - B. Rigid customs surrounding trivial events, such as visits and parties
- III. Manners of lower classes—clergy, tradespeople, and farmers**
 - A. Emma's disdain for lower classes despite their hard work and tolerance
 - B. Their high regard for her despite her sloth and intolerance
- IV. Contrived attempts at breaking class separation**
 - A. Emma's scheme to elevate Harriet to Mr. Elton's class
 - B. Mrs. Elton's humorous pretense of finery and connections
 - C. Mrs. Churchill's "out-Churchilling" the upper-class family she married into
- V. Genuine class breakthroughs to point up the folly of rigid separation**
 - A. Emma's enduring friendship with her governess
 - B. Robert Martin's display of true gentility
 - C. Orphan Jane Fairfax's engagement to gentrified Frank Churchill
 - D. Mr. Knightley's dignified rebellion against his class
 1. His walking or riding a horse instead of using a carriage
 2. His dancing with Harriet at the Crown Inn Ball

TOPIC #2

Emotions in this novel, as well as Jane Austen's other novels, are often muted. How are Emma's negative feelings of jealousy, embarrassment and mortification expressed through her actions? How are her positive feelings of delight in family, satisfaction in self-control, and doing one's duty shown?

Outline

- I. Thesis Statement:** *Emma shows a wide range of feelings through subtle behavior.*

II. Emma's jealousy

- A. Coldness toward Jane Fairfax
- B. Conspiring with Frank Churchill to taunt Jane

III. Emma's embarrassment

- A. Explaining Mr. Elton's marriage to Harriet
- B. Justifying her offensive remarks to Miss Bates

IV. Emma's mortification

- A. Putting up with Mrs. Elton's pretensions to snobbery
- B. Dreading she will lose Harriet to Mr. Knightley

V. Emma's delight in family

- A. Tolerating her father's eccentricities
- B. Warmth of feeling for her nieces and nephews and her sister's domestic bliss
- C. Pride in being associated with the Knightleys on her visit to Donwell Abbey

VI. Emma's satisfaction in self-control

- A. Holding her tongue during Miss Bates' windy speeches
- B. Concealing her feelings for Mr. Knightley from Harriet
- C. Wishing Frank and Jane well

VII. Emma doing her duty

- A. Paying courtesy calls
 - 1. Continual attentions to Mr. and Mrs. Weston
 - 2. Going to see Jane Fairfax after the secret engagement is revealed
- B. Acknowledging Mr. Knightley's claim on her

TOPIC #3

In accordance with the chivalric tradition, a romance blooms when a gallant man proves his love for his lady by passing a series of heroic tests. In *Emma*, we have a sharp reversal. What tests does Emma have to pass in order to be worthy of the love of Mr. Knightley?

Outline

I. Thesis statement: *Emma represents a reversal of the chivalric tradition.*

II. Warnings Emma fails to heed

- A. That her friendship with Harriet will not help Harriet
- B. That Frank Churchill is weak
- C. That there exists an admiration of Frank for Jane

III. Chastisements Emma must endure

- A. For setting Harriet against her own class
- B. For failing to see the worth and suitability of Mr. Martin
- C. For finding anything admirable about Frank Churchill
- D. For offending Miss Bates

IV. Lessons Emma must learn to be worthy of Mr. Knightley

- A. Humility
 - 1. In facing Harriet about Mr. Elton's marriage
 - 2. In facing the truth about Frank and Jane's engagement
- B. Powerlessness
 - 1. In bowing to Jane's superior talent
 - 2. In knowing that Frank manipulated her to hide his engagement to Jane
 - 3. In knowing that she pushed Harriet into falling for Mr. Knightley
- C. Grace
 - 1. Rejoicing in Harriet's happiness with Mr. Martin
 - 2. Extending the hand of friendship to Jane Fairfax
- D. Duty
 - 1. Clearing the air with Frank
 - 2. Taking care of her father in partnership with Mr. Knightley