

ANALYZING LITERATURE

When you are asked to write an analysis of a short story or novel, you should use the skills of literary analysis. Critical papers analyze and explain some important points about a piece of literature. They do not repeat the plot. The following items will help you organize and plan your paper. You do not need to include every one of these items in every paper you write, but you should select the ones which are most necessary for your topic. Use the following as a checklist for your literary analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Write a draft of the introduction first. Revise it after you have completed the paper.

Statement of topic: Be sure to name the work and its author early in the first part of the paper.

Statement of interest: Explain the point which interests you.

Statement of problem: Explain the critical disagreement, textual problem or other problem under consideration.

Your way to Solve the Problem: How will your paper try to solve that problem or analyze a difficult point?

Any of these methods is useful:

analysis of theme

close textual analysis

sociological, psychological or
historical context

survey of other critical opinions

analysis of images of figurative language

analysis of structure

analysis of character

analysis of character

interpretation of lines

Statement of Thesis: What is the main point your paper will illustrate and/or explain? Give a clear statement, preferably in one sentence.

Forecast of organization: In longer papers especially, give the reader a map, a guide to the organization you will follow. If you will examine three important passages in the work, indicate that.

BODY OF THE PAPER

All paragraphs, sections and chapters must support your thesis and work toward a solution to the problem you have stated.

Support for your argument: Be sure every paragraph has a unified topic which helps develop your argument.

Use specific quotes and examples from the work you are discussing.

Analyze characters carefully: What they do; what they say; how others treat them; what others say about them; what the narrator says.

Isolate main issues & find words to justify your emphasis on them.

Provide close readings, textual analysis.

Use vivid verbs, ones which give a sense of sight, sound, activity.

Avoid the passive voice.

Cite important critics who support your thesis.

Answer critics who argue against your thesis.

Use your best arguments and strongest examples last.

CONCLUSION

For a longer paper, the conclusion should review the argument which you have pursued and restate the thesis. Highlight the importance of your argument. Leave your reader feeling satisfied that you know the material, discussed it fairly, and argued your thesis convincingly. Never end a paper with another critic's words. Use your own words.