

Critical Analysis



A critical analysis of literature (literary criticism) is a detailed study of one aspect of fiction, verse, or drama such as **plot construction, characterization, symbolism, imagery, theme, point of view**, etc. When someone writes such a paper, his/her intent is:

1. to study one element in a work so that he/she can have a better understanding and perhaps a better appreciation of the work as a whole,
2. to test his/her own critical judgment as a thinker and a writer, and
3. to share this examination with his/her reader.

Writing a Critical Analysis:

- ✓ Before one can make such a study, he/she must read closely and understand the work as a whole.
- ✓ Because the study should be as objective as possible, the essay itself needs to be written with an objective tone and point of view.
- ✓ The writer must determine the purpose or intention of the author because only on that basis can he/she make any judgment fairly or indeed have any real understanding.
- ✓ If the essay is to have any purpose, both to the writer and to the reader, it must, at the least, **confirm** a specific judgment about a literary work or **provide** a convincing interpretation of such a work.
- ✓ The idea must be clearly stated for the reader--both as the central idea in an outline, if required, and in the essay.

REMEMBER--

- Avoid expressions like "I feel," "I believe," or "I think." (such expressions state the obvious)
- **Do not** write a plot summary.
- The narrator or a character of a literary work **does not necessarily** represent the author himself or herself.

Overall, there are basically **three** kinds of assignments which you may be required to write. There are those in which you will:

Analyze	Take the story, poem, or other work apart to consider one or more of its elements such as plot or character
Interpret	Discover the work's possible meaning(s).
Evaluate	Judge the work's merit and consider whether or not its author has been successful

When you write about literature, you use all the skills you bring to any writing assignment. Your goal is to make a point and support it with appropriate references to the work under discussion or even to other related works. Beyond this, additional sources (*secondary sources*) commenting on the literature

under examination are sometimes required and may be used to help you further support your position.

Below are the important requirements of any valid study. Read and follow each one carefully:

1. Closely read the work to be studied. Take note of things which spark your interest.
2. Now, consider the various aspects of the work.
 - a. What function do certain characters play in the work's plot or theme?
 - b. What significance does the setting hold?
 - c. Are there any words that seem to be repeated?
3. When writing about literature **use present-tense** verbs.
 - a. **Use past tense verbs only when discussing historical events.**
4. Support all points with specific, concrete examples from the work you are discussing.
5. Combine quotations, summaries, **and paraphrases** smoothly into your paper.
6. **Acknowledge** all sources, **including work** or works under discussion.
7. If **MLA documentation format** is required **by** your instructor, use **parenthetical references** and include a *Works Cited* list or the current MLA Documentation Guide for Writers of Research Papers



SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN DESIGNED TO ENHANCE YOUR CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS. Ask yourself these questions while you are reading the story or selected area in which you will work, such as characterization, and use the questions under that category to help you think about the story.

PLOT:

- ✓ What conflicts occur in the story?
- ✓ How is this conflict resolved?
- ✓ How do these conflicts move the plot along?
- ✓ Does the narrative move rapidly?
- ✓ How do events relate to one another?
- ✓ How do single events relate to the work as a whole?
- ✓ How are the events arranged in time?
- ✓ Is the opening action interesting?
- ✓ Is the story drawn out after the climax?--**Climax** refers to the point of greatest tension or importance in a play or story; the point at which the decisive action takes place.
- ✓ Is the story convincing, believable?

SETTING:

- ✓ Where and when do the events take place?
- ✓ Are many descriptive details given?
- ✓ Are details given in lumps, or are they worked in gradually?

- ✓ What is the relationship between the setting and the plot?
- ✓ How does the setting create the mood of the story?
- ✓ How does the setting affect the characters?

CHARACTERIZATION:

- ✓ What conflicts exist between the protagonist and the antagonist?
- ✓ What traits, feelings, and values are exhibited by the characters?
- ✓ How do the characters relate to one another?
- ✓ Are the characters fully developed? Stereotypes?
- ✓ Are the major characters changed by the events? How?
- ✓ Do the major characters learn from experience? How?
- ✓ Does this knowledge affect the other characters and the plot? How?
- ✓ How are characters developed? By the narrator? By other characters' descriptions?

POINT OF VIEW:

- ✓ Is the story told in first, second, or third person?
- ✓ How much does the narrator know about the events?
- ✓ Is the narrator attached or involved?
- ✓ Is the narrator a character in the story?
- ✓ Is the narrator trustworthy?

TOPE AND STYLE:

- ✓ What is the tone of the story? (light, serious, bitter, etc.)
- ✓ What is the narrator's tone in the story?
- ✓ Are there any examples of irony?
- ✓ What words or phrases are repeated throughout the story?
- ✓ Is there any unusual language, or is there an unusual character?
- ✓ Are there any figures of speech? Symbols? Patterns of imagery?
- ✓ Does the length of the piece or of the sentences relate to the effect of the story?

THEME:

- ✓ What is the central or dominant idea of the work?
- ✓ What issues are considered in the work?
- ✓ What conflicts are presented in the work?
- ✓ How does each element of the story contribute to its theme?
- ✓ Is there an unusual or profound idea as the basis of the story?
- ✓ You should be able to express the basic idea in a single sentence.
- ✓ Does the theme smother the story, or is it well-integrated within it?