



## Literary Analysis Checklist

- ⇒ Have you carefully read the text several times before considering how you will analyze it?
- ⇒ Do you have a clear thesis that examines your interpretation of the literature?
- ⇒ Is your thesis debatable?
- ⇒ Do you avoid simply summarizing the text?
- ⇒ Do you write about the events in the story/play from the present tense?
- ⇒ Do you provide examples from the story, play, or poem to support your analysis or interpretation?
- ⇒ Do you cite your source(s) using MLA format?

### Works Cited

- BHCC Writing Center. "Writing About Literature." Tampa, BHCC Writing Center, n.d. Print.
- Delany, James. "How to Write a Critical Literary Essay." *Cuyuga Community College*. n.d. Web. 19 March 2014.
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- . "Literature Topics and Research." *Online Writing Lab*. 28 Sept. 2013. Web. 20 May 2014.
- Gardner, Janet E. *Writing about Literature: A Portable Guide*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009.



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The Writing Center



## Literary Analysis



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# Literary Analysis

## Steps to Begin:

Before beginning to write a literary analysis, make sure you use the following steps to ensure you know the text you are writing about well.

- Read the work several times before attempting to analyze
- Underline significant words or phrases
- Take notes as you read and develop your own perspective
- Pose questions about the work and look for clues to possible answers as you read

## What Is Literary Analysis?

Literary analysis is when you provide your own interpretation or explanation of what you think about the piece of literature you are reading.

When you are writing a literary analysis, there are a few things that you want to keep in mind:

- ⇒ You must have a thesis statement that argues your interpretation of the text you are reading. The thesis **MUST** be debatable!
- ⇒ Assume the reader has already read the text and summary isn't necessary, unless your instructor tells you otherwise.
- ⇒ Avoid general or insignificant info in your paper.
- ⇒ Provide specific examples from the text to support the thesis.
- ⇒ Make sure you are using proper MLA format when you are citing your sources. Sources can either be primary—i.e., the literary text you are analyzing—or secondary—additional research to support your thesis.

NOTE: Unless you are writing a research paper, your instructor may not want you to use secondary sources, so always double check.

## Literary Elements to Think About:\*

The following elements are often great places to start thinking about and analyzing literature. Examine the following:

### Fiction:

- Plot: the unfolding of events or patterns within a story or poem, which can be effectively analyzed when the plot is unexpected

NOTE: If you are analyzing the plot, avoid simply summarizing.

- Characters: the protagonist and the antagonist or even a minor character and how this individual changes or develops
- Point of View: the person telling the story and whether or not he or she is a part of the plot or an outsider
- Setting: the time and place the story is taking place and how that effects the outcome of the story
- Theme: an abstract concept the author is writing about—i.e., love, war, friendship, etc.—consider what the author is trying to say about that theme
- Symbolism: an image that has greater significance than the surface meaning
- Style: also called tone or language, the diction the author uses to express a certain mood within the writing

### Poetry:

- Speaker: in poetry, the person who would be saying the words of this poem

NOTE: Remember this is not always the author of the poem.

- Listener: the person that the poem is addressed to
- Imagery: taking abstract ideas and making them concrete with vivid description and use of the senses, consider how these images affect you as the reader
- Sound and Sense: the form and sounds within a poem, rhyming at the end of lines and within the lines, repetition of consonant sounds, the rhythm, the meter, the lines, and the stanzas

\* While, this pamphlet contains many of the literary elements and forms of analysis, some may have been excluded. Consult your instructor or textbook for more information.

### Drama:

- Plot, Character, and Theme: consider how a play shows the audience how the events unfold rather than telling you
- Dialogue: the way the characters speak and the words they use to reveal information about who they are
- Setting: can be determined by the set onstage or the dialogue of the characters

## Ways to Analyze Literature:\*

- ⇒ Reader Response: focusing on the reader's reactions and the intellectual and emotional connections he/she makes
- ⇒ New Criticism/Formalism: examines the text using the literary elements.
- ⇒ Archetypal/Mythic: looks at the traditional meanings of literature, focusing on universal figures or models
- ⇒ Political: analyzes a text from a political perspective
- ⇒ Didactic/Moral: claims that good literature will elevate the reader by teaching values and morals for the individual and society
- ⇒ Queer Theory: examines the position of the marginalized; i.e., LGBTQ, feminism, etc.
- ⇒ Historical: focuses on the historic events surrounding the setting or the author's life
- ⇒ Auto/Biographical: examines the author's life as a lens to understand the text

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