What is criticism?

1. In the non-literary sense, criticism is basically “constructive criticism,” or someone berating you to help you to improve yourself.
2. In the literary sense, however, critics are reviewers. Sharing an opinion over a piece of literature has developed into a genre called criticism.
3. Not only does literature influence criticism, but also criticism influences literature.

What is new criticism?

1. New criticism is a genre defending “new” works of art or literature, stating that criticism is interpretation (not “thumbs up” or “thumbs down.”)
2. This genre first started to appear in the 20th century.
3. New criticism tries to understand what a text is about, how it describes things, how it makes you feel, and finally what its themes or philosophical interpretations are.
4. New criticism eventually evolved into literary theory.
5. Literary theory is a broad concept. Everyone can have their own interpretation of a text, if it is backed up by evidence.
6. There are many different branches of literary theory.

General Points About Literary Theory:

1. Criticism does not imply value judgment. Instead of just saying that a text is good or bad, literary theory is more investigative. Literary theory tells us why and how a text functions, or does what it does.
2. The history of literary theory is intertwined with philosophy. European Continental philosophy thinkers, like Nietzsche, Sartre, and Marx, have contributed a lot to criticism and literary theory. Philosophy is analyzing life and how we live it, and books are a metaphor for life, so philosophers have often analyzed books as well.
3. Literary theory is not confined to just books. The deep, thorough analysis so necessary to literary theory can be applied almost anywhere, such as plays, music albums, and even people.

Major Types of Literary Theory:

1. Formalism:
2. Major Critics of the Time: Mikhail Bakhtin.
3. Overview: Most modern criticism is based on formalism. Began in Russia in early 20th century. Formalists rejected previous romantic ideas, which placed value on the genius of the author, not so much on the text. To formalists, only the text matters. The importance of the author is questioned. New criticism, which happens in England much later, is almost exactly like formalism. In new criticism and formalism, critics did close reading, which means picking out the important details and examining each of these.
4. Major Critical Works: “The Intentional Fallacy,” by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley. This article says that whatever the author meant to write or mean does not matter. It only matters about your understanding of the text, as long as it is backed up by evidence.
5. Deconstructionism:
6. Major Critics of the Time: Jacques Derrida
7. Overview: All texts contain inherent contradictions. All things—including words—only have meaning in relation, or opposition to other things. For example, truth means “not false.” But what does false mean? Again you have to refer to truth, so this is a contradiction. Deconstructionism studies these aspects, where concepts inside a text come into conflict with each other, and they try to break down what’s actually happening.
8. Major Themes of Deconstructionism:  
   i. Deconstructionism looks at the accidental elements inside a text. Accidental elements are anything that doesn’t seem central to the text. For example, if an author describes a scene in a café, and before that describes the café itself, the café is not actually central to the text. Why is the author spending time describing the café if it is not central to the text? These are the questions deconstructionism looks at.

ii. Deconstructionism looks at things that disturb the tranquility of the text.

iii. Deconstruction also attempts to uncover the questions behind a text.

1. Postmodernism:
2. Overview: Study of differences inside a text, not contradictory elements covered in deconstructionism.
3. Major Themes of Postmodernism:
4. Questioning Objective Thought. How much influence does an author actually have in a text?
5. The role of the other, or the socially marginalized individual