WRITING A LITERARY ESSAY

Prepare for Week 9's midterm (the three-paragraph literary essay) by discussing one of the following questions about *The Catcher in the Rye*. Before that, however, your teacher may form smaller groups and ask each group member to read an assigned section in this package about writing literary essays. Share what you have read and learned (i.e., jigsaw reading) before discussing one of the following questions in your groups.

1. Salinger weaves a variety of symbols into *The Catcher in the Rye*, including (but not limited to) the red hunting hat, the ducks in Central Park, and Allie's mitt. Select and analyze one symbol that Salinger uses in the book. Explain how Salinger develops this object as a symbol throughout the story. Discuss the symbol's meaning and significance, and explore its contributions to the overall message of the novel.

2. Throughout the novel, Holden is a tormented adolescent. He feels alienated and isolated at Pency Prep, he is belittled by women he wants to impress, he is beaten up twice, he wants to run away and cut himself off from all other people, and he even considers suicide. Yet, in spite of Holden's pain, the novel is funny. It really is. Why did Salinger choose humor as the tone for the novel? How does Salinger's use of humor contribute to the book's overall meaning and effect? Consider how the book's overall meaning would be different if Salinger did not use so much humor.

3. Critic David D. Galloway said, .Wherever Holden turns, his craving for truth seems to be frustrated by the phoniness of the world.. Analyze Holden's use of the word "phony". What does the word mean in the context of the book, and does Holden offer any alternative to phoniness? Is Holden himself guilty of being a phony? How does Salinger want readers to judge ideas about phoniness?

4. Discuss the meaning or impact of the title of the book as a central, controlling symbol of the story. How does Holden's wish to be the catcher in the rye. Help readers understand both his character and the nature of his deep troubles and concerns about life? Be sure to address the significance of Holden's misreading of the Robert Burns poem.

5. Critic Maxwell Geismar writes, "*The Catcher in the Rye* protests, to be sure, against both the academic and social conformity of its period. But what does it argue for?"
Write an essay to explain what the book .argues for. What might Salinger have been trying to communicate to his readers through this novel, and how does he do so?

6. Holden, like each of us, faces living in a world he did not create. Nobody, not even Holden, can live in a culture without having some of it rub off on them. What faults of his society does Holden exhibit? How does Salinger reveal these faults to readers?

RESOURCE 1

CHAPTER 5

WRITING LITERARY ARGUMENTS

Most of the essays you write about literature are **expository**— that is, you write to give information to readers. For example, you might discuss the rhyme or meter of a poem or examine the interaction of two characters in a play. (Most of the student essays in this book are expository.) Other essays you write may be **literary arguments** that is, you take a position on a debatable topic and attempt to change readers' minds about it. The more persuasive your argumentative essay, the more likely readers will be to concede your points and grant your conclusion.

When you write a literary argument, you follow the same process you do when you write any essay about a literary topic. However, because the purpose of an argument is to convince readers, you need to use some additional strategies to present your ideas.

Planning a Literary Argument

Choosing a Debatable Topic

Frequently, an instructor will assign a topic or specify a particular literary work for you to discuss. Your first step will be to decide exactly what you will write about. Because an argumentative essay attempts to change the way readers think, it must focus on a **debatable topic**, one about which reasonable people may disagree. **Factual statements**— statements about which reasonable people do *not* disagree — are therefore inappropriate as topics for argument.

Factual Statement: Linda Loman is Willy Loman's long-suffering wife in Arthur Miller's play Death of a Salesman.

Debatable Topic: More than a stereotype of the long-suffering wife, Linda Loman in Arthur Miller's play Death of a Salesman is a multidimensional character.

In addition to being debatable, your topic should be narrow enough for you to develop within your page limit. After all, in an argumentative essay, you will have

to present your own ideas and supply convincing support while also pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of opposing arguments. If your topic is too broad, you will not be able to discuss it in enough detail.

Finally, your topic should be interesting. Keep in mind that some topics — such as the significance of the wall in Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall" — have been written about so often that you will probably not be able to say anything very new or interesting about them. Instead of relying on an overused topic, choose one that enables you to write something original.

Developing an Argumentative Thesis

After you have chosen your topic, your next step is to state your position in an **argumentative thesis** — one that takes a strong stand. Properly worded, this thesis statement will lay the foundation for the rest of your argument.

One way to make sure that your thesis actually does take a stand is to formulate an **antithesis** — a statement that takes an arguable position opposite from yours. If you can construct an antithesis, you can be certain that your thesis statement takes a stand. If you cannot, your thesis statement needs further revision to make it argumentative thesis.

Thesis Statement: `The last line of Richard Wright's short story "Big Black Good Man" indicates that Jim was fully aware all along of Olaf's deep-seated racial prejudice.`

Antithesis: `The last line of Richard Wright's short story "Big Black Good Man" indicates that Jim remained unaware of Olaf's feelings toward him.`

Whenever possible, test your argumentative thesis statement on your classmates — either informally in classroom conversations or formally in a peer-review session.

✔ CHECKLIST Developing an Argumentative Thesis

- ☐ Can you formulate an antithesis?
- ☐ Does your thesis statement make clear to readers what position you are taking?
- ☐ Can you support your thesis with evidence from the text and from research?

Defining Your Terms

You should always define the key terms you use in your argument. For example, if you are using the term *narrator* in an essay, make sure that readers know you are referring to a first-person, not a third-person, narrator. In addition, clarify the difference between an **unreliable narrator**— someone who misrepresents or misinterprets events — and a **reliable narrator**— someone who accurately describes events. Without a clear definition of the terms you are using, readers may have a very difficult time understanding the point you are making.

Defining Your Terms

Be especially careful to use precise terms in your thesis statement. Avoid vague and judgmental words, such as *wrong, bad, good, right,* and *immoral.*

Vague: The poem "Birmingham Sunday (September 15, 1963)" by Langston Hughes shows how bad racism can be.

Clearer: The poem "Birmingham Sunday (September 15, 1963)" by Langston Hughes makes a moving statement about how destructive racism can be.

Considering Your Audience

As you plan your essay, keep your audience in mind. For example, if you are writing about a work that has been discussed in class, you can assume that your readers are familiar with it; include plot summaries only when they are needed to explain or support a point you are making. Keep in mind that you will be addressing an academic audience—your instructor and possibly some students. For this reason, you should be sure to follow the conventions of writing about literature as well as the conventions of standard written English (for information on the conventions of writing about literature, see the checklist in Chapter 2, p. 000.)

When you write an argumentative essay, always assume that you are addressing a skeptical audience. Remember, your thesis is debatable, so not everyone will agree with you — and even if your readers are sympathetic to your position, you cannot assume that they will accept your ideas without question.

The strategies you use to convince your readers will vary according to your relationship with them. Somewhat skeptical readers may need to see only that your argument is logical and that your evidence is solid. More skeptical readers, however, may need to see that you understand their positions and that you concede some of their points. Of course, you may never be able to convince hostile readers that your conclusions are legitimate. The best you can hope for is that these

readers will acknowledge the strengths of your argument even if they remain skeptical about your conclusion.

Refuting Opposing Arguments

As you develop your literary argument, you may need to **refute**—that is, to disprove — opposing arguments by demonstrating that they are false, misguided, or illogical. By summarizing and refuting opposing views, you more opposing arguments seem less credible to readers; thus, you strengthen your case. When an opposing argument is so strong that it cannot be easily dismissed, however, you should concede the strength of the argument and then point out its limitations.

Notice in the following paragraph how a student refutes the argument that Homer Barron, a character in William Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily," is gay.

Opposing argument / Concession / Refutation

A number of critics have suggested that Homer Barron, Miss Emily's suitor, is gay. Certainly, there is some evidence in the story to support this interpretation. For example, the narrator points out that Homer "liked the company of men" (Faulkner 000) and that he was not "a marrying man" (Faulkner 000). In addition, the narrator describes Homer as wearing yellow gloves when he took Emily for drives. According to the critic William Greenslade, in the 1890s yellow was associated with homosexuality (24). This evidence, however, does not establish that Homer is gay. During the nineteenth century, many men preferred the company of other men (as many do today). This, in itself, did not mean they were gay. Neither does the fact that Homer wore yellow gloves. According to the narrator, Homer was a man who liked to dress well. It is certainly possible that he wore these gloves to impress Miss Emily, a woman he was trying to attract.

Using Evidence Effectively

Supporting Your Literary Argument

Many literary arguments are built on **assertions**—statements made about a debatable topic—backed by **evidence**—supporting examples in the form of references to the text, quotations, and the opinions of literary critics. For example, if you stated that Torvald Helmer, Nora's husband in Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll House*, is as much a victim of society as his wife is, you could support this assertion with relevant quotations and examples from the play. You could also paraphrase, summarize, or quote the ideas of literary critics who also hold this opinion. Remember, only assertions that are **self-evident** (All plays include charac-

ters and dialogue) or **factual** (*A Doll House* was published in 1879) need no supporting evidence. All other kinds of assertions require support.

NOTE: Your thesis statement is an assertion that your entire essay supports. Keep in mind, however, that you can never prove your thesis conclusively—if you could, there would be no argument. The best you can do is provide enough evidence to establish a high probability that your thesis is reasonable.

Establishing Credibility

Some people bring **credibility** with them whenever they write. When a well-known literary critic evaluates the contributions of a particular writer, you can assume that he or she speaks with authority. (Although you might question the critic's opinions, you do not question his or her expertise.) But most people do not have this kind of credibility. When you write a literary argument, you must constantly work to establish credibility.

Clear reasoning, compelling evidence, and strong refutations go a long way toward making an argument solid. But these elements in themselves are not enough to create a convincing literary argument. In order to persuade readers, you have to satisfy them that you have credibility — which you can do by demonstrating knowledge, maintaining a reasonable tone, and presenting yourself as someone worth listening to.

Demonstrating Knowledge One way to establish credibility is by presenting your own carefully considered ideas about a subject. A clear argument and compelling support can demonstrate to readers that you know what you are talking about.

You can also show readers that you have thoroughly researched your subject. By referring to important sources of information and by providing accurate documentation for your information, you present evidence that you have done the necessary background reading. Including a range of sources — not just one or two — suggests that you are well acquainted with your subject. Remember, however, questionable sources, inaccurate (or missing) documentation, and factual errors can undermine your credibility. For many readers, an undocumented quotation or even an incorrect date can call an entire argument into question.

Maintaining a Reasonable Tone Your **tone**— your attitude toward your readers or subject — is almost as important as the information you convey. Talk *to* your readers not *at* them. If you lecture your readers or appear to talk down to them, you will alienate them. Remember that readers are more likely to respond to a writer who seems balanced and respectful than one who seems strident or condescending.

As you write your essay, use moderate language, and qualify your statements so that they seem reasonable. Try to avoid words and phrases such as *all*, *never*, *always*, and *in every case*, which can make your points seem simplistic, exaggerated, or

unrealistic. Also, avoid absolute statements. For example, the statement, `In "Doe Season," the ocean symbolizes Andy's attachment to her mother,` leaves no room for other possible interpretations. A more measured and accurate statement might be, `In "Doe Season," the symbol of the ocean might suggest Andy's identification with her mother and her realization that she is becoming a woman.`

Presenting Yourself as Someone Worth Listening To When you write a literary argument, you should try to present yourself as someone your readers will want to listen to. Make your argument confidently, and don't apologize for your views. For example, do not use phrases such as "In my opinion" and "It seems to me," which undercut your credibility. Be consistent, and be careful not to contradict yourself. Finally, avoid the use of *I* (unless you are asked to give your opinion or to write a reaction statement), and avoid slang and colloquialisms.

Conventions for Writing a Literary Analysis Paper

This handout can be used in conjunction with the Tutoring Center's resource, How to Write a Literary Analysis Paper.

Your Writing Style and Voice

Use formal, academic diction (word choice) in a literary analysis. Therefore, write in the third person. First person (I, me, our, we, etc.) and second person (you) are too informal for academic writing, and most literature professors prefer students to write in third person.

The Literary Present

Do not write about a literary text in the past tense. Instead, use the "literary present." Literary works are considered to exist in the present tense. In academic writing, it is expected that you will write a literary analysis in the present tense.

Audience

Consider your audience as you write your literary analysis. Assume that your audience is your professor and other students in your class. Remember, you do not need to retell or summarize the piece of literature. Instead, **your purpose is to analyze and interpret the literary work** in relation to your thesis (your argument). Therefore, **avoid plot summary** in a literary analysis.

Organization

- As with other types of academic writing, a literary analysis should adhere to the introduction, body paragraph, conclusion model.
- **Your argument and your voice must carry the weight in a literary analysis paper**. Even if you incorporate research in your paper, be sure that it supports your own argument and does not overtake *your voice*.
- Again, avoid plot summary, and construct a specific thesis statement that conveys a claim that you will prove in your body paragraphs.

1. Introductory Paragraph
    - The **thesis statement** should typically appear in your first paragraph and is usually embedded at the end of this introductory paragraph.
        - In a lengthy research paper, sometimes the thesis statement appears in the second paragraph.
    - You must make clear, full reference to the literary work and author you are writing about somewhere in your introductory paragraph.
    - Include any relevant background information that your reader might need to understand your overall purpose.

2. Body/Developmental Paragraphs
    - Each subsequent paragraph after the introduction must include topic sentences, and these topic sentences, as well as the content of each paragraph, must support the thesis statement.
        - Topic sentences (usually the first sentence in each paragraph):
            1. Relate the details of the paragraph to your overall thesis.
            2. Tie the details of the paragraph together (paragraph unity).
    - A solid literary analysis contains an explanation of your ideas and evidence

from the text for the purpose of supporting your ideas. **Textual evidence** consists of **specific details, direct quotations, summaries, and/or paraphrases.**

- The substance of each of your body paragraphs will be the explanations, summaries, paraphrases, specific details, and direct quotations you need to support and develop the more general statement you have made in your topic sentence.

3. Conclusion
   The conclusion should tie together your essay's argument and ideas. Some approaches to the conclusion are as follows: restating the thesis (in different words) and expanding on its importance, summarizing the essay's main points and pondering their significance, commenting on the literary work from a difference perspective. The conclusion should not introduce a new topic that has not been touched on in your essay.

The Thesis Statement

Remember, a literary analysis paper requires you to pose an argument and provide detailed examples from the text to support that argument. The thesis statement establishes the overall point of your essay, and it fulfills two main objectives:

1. The thesis must *state your topic*.
2. The thesis must convey *what you will prove about your topic* (your opinion about that topic).

*The thesis statement is most often embedded in the introductory paragraph, usually at the end of that paragraph. Occasionally, as in the below example, a thesis statement might consist of more than one sentence.

According to the *Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers*, the basic requirements for a thesis statement include the following:

- the essay's subject—the topic that you discuss
- the essay's purpose—either informative or persuasive
- your focus—the assertion that presents your point of view
- specific language—not vague words
- brief overview of the topic's subdivisions

(Troyka and Hesse 45)

Try this strategy to develop and narrow a thesis statement.

To write an effective thesis statement, start with a general idea and then sharpen your focus.

Step 1: Choose a topic, e.g., the poem "Theme for English B" by Langston Hughes

Step 2: Focus the topic, e.g., biographical influences in "Theme for English B," especially the poet's race, and how literary critics assess such influences on this poem

Step 3: Narrow the topic further by posing it as a question.
E.g., How do critics classify Hughes's poems, especially those that are related to race?

How did Hughes's experience as an African American man affect his poetry? What elements in the poem reflect Hughes's experience as an African American man?

Step 4: Answer the question. The answer is your thesis statement.

E.g., Critics classify Langston Hughes's work into poems of social and "racial protest" and poems of "racial affirmation" (DiYanni 522-523). "Theme for English B," however, does not nestle neatly within either category, as it exudes a more complicated tone of both pride and frustration.

**Notice that this thesis statement proposes an argument and specifies particular literary elements that will be analyzed to help substantiate or prove the argument. This thesis statement also refers to literary critics and uses a quote from a secondary source. Be sure to ask your professor if it is acceptable to do research for a literary analysis as well as if it is acceptable to refer to an outside source in the thesis statement. Doing so will depend on the parameters of your specific assignment.

Your thesis statement should be clear and direct and should entice your audience to read further. Each subsequent paragraph in the body of your paper should support your thesis statement and prove your claim.

Proper Writing and Citation of Direct Quotations

Direct quotations are one type of textual evidence that can be used to support your interpretation of a literary text.

Use quotations sparingly.

Remember to use quotations with discretion. Do not saturate your paper with overuse of quotations. Rather, use only relevant quotations *to support your ideas.* Limit quoting to key statements and ideas.

Integrate quotations smoothly.

When you use quotations, work them into your writing as smoothly as possible. To do so, pay attention to style and punctuation. Use "signal phrases" to introduce a quotation. Never end a paragraph with a quotation. Your own interpretation or analysis should *always* follow a quotation. Try the "sandwich" technique. See the below formula and examples.

Example 1: "Sandwiching" Quotations

In her essay "The Ghosts of Ellis Island," Mary Gordon observes, "The minute I set foot upon the island I could feel all that it stood for: insecurity, obedience, anxiety, dehumanization, the terrified and careful deference of the displaced" (392). Gordon blends her personal point of view with a historical perspective to characterize the immigrant experience of profound dispossession.

Work Cited

Gordon, Mary. "The Ghosts of Ellis Island." The Writer's Presence: A Pool of Readings.

3rd ed. Ed. Donald McQuade and Robert Atwan. New York and Boston:

Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

1. Introduce the quote to provide context for the reader.
    - Include the title and author if you are using the source for the first time.
    - Use a "signal phrase" to introduce the quote (author's name + verb).

2. Direct Quote
    - Use a direct quote when an author writes in specialized or particularly powerful language and when such textual evidence enhances your paper's argument.
    - Be precise. Do not use a quote from an outside source (secondary source) if it is not well written or if you can state the point more clearly in your own words. In that case, you might summarize or paraphrase the author's ideas. If you summarize or paraphrase, you must still cite the source to credit the author.

3. Your Analysis / Interpretation of the Quote
    - Explain and discuss how the quote is significant. Relate the quote to **your purpose** in your paper.
    - Demonstrate that this quote serves to make a particular point in your argument.

Example 2: Student Writing

The following excerpt is from Elizabeth A. Vassallo's essay, "Protest Music of the Vietnam War: A Struggling Generation Moved to Action." This essay was published in Fresh Ink: Essays from Boston College's First-Year Writing Seminar 2002. Notice the organization and the use of an indirect quote, as indicated by the parenthetical notation (qtd. in…).

> […] Former President Bill Clinton credits Bob Dylan with "providing those who protested the Vietnam War with a moral compass as accessible to the nearest radio" (qtd. in "Voice of America"). Clearly, though, Bob Dylan did not speak for his generation on his own, but rather was aided by many other musicians who also decided that it was time to truly speak up to their contemporaries and to the world.

Work Cited

"Voice of America: At 60, Bob Dylan Is Still His Generation's Troubadour." Editorial.

Pittsburgh-Post Gazette (23 May 2001): A-24.

How to Write a Literary Analysis

Understanding the Task and Getting Started

Literary analysis is a skill in which the elements that make up a whole unit are examined. The unit can be a poem, a short story, an essay, a novel, an advertisement, artwork, or a film. Consider that authors (and their editors) make many choices that result in what the audience sees, how the work can be interpreted, and how it affects readers. Analysis helps readers to understand how a piece of literature works and how it conveys specific ideas or creates specific effects on readers.

Think like a scientist who examines the individual aspects of a specimen. For literary analysis, the elements to consider are the following:

Title	Figurative Language	Tone
Diction	Imagery	Exposition (order of ideas)
Setting	Structure	Prose Style
Characterization	Plot, Action, Pacing, and	Scansion
Metaphor	Timing	Allusions and References

As a writer, you are asked to do the same thing as the scientist–make careful observations about the different elements of a literary work, such as theme, setting, character, or plot. Remember that you are making these observations for a reason, which is the claim or *thesis statement* that you set up in the introduction. The details and examples of your analytical investigation will become the supporting evidence that proves your essay's central claim or thesis.

Collecting the Information and Cataloguing the Elements

Completing a successful analysis involves time to inspect the work. For literature-based assignments, read the work once to become familiar with just the surface details, like characters, plots, setting, etc. This initial reading will help you to identify the specific and objective facts and evidence that will help to support your interpretation of the text. Facts and evidence, in this context, are what actually appear on the page (words, the actual text and the obvious concrete details the text conveys, such as the basic plot).

There are two main types of information that can be collected during the text exploration process: Subjective and Objective. Both types have value when analyzing literature; however, it is important to understand the difference to avoid writing a personal essay and to ensure the focus remains on literary analysis.

Subjective information is often gathered from your first reading of the material or during the journaling and prewriting phase of literary analysis. Subjective information is personal in that it reflects an individual's response to something. It is important to recognize that your reading of the text is in itself subjective. Feelings that arise while reading are often useful in generating the initial connections between what you already know about an aspect of the human experience and what is expressed in the work. While reading, annotate this subjective information in the margins of your text. Much of this data may be unrelated when you write your essay, but by taking notes, the idea will be preserved in case it is needed later. Once you have completed your initial read, go back through the subjective reactions you experienced to analyze your response and narrow your thoughts to an objective and specific argument that can be supported with textual evidence.

Objective information is verifiable within the text and will be the focus of your literary analysis. If you can see it, then another person can too, as opposed to subjective thoughts and feelings which can't be proven. Objective

information stays closely connected to the text and will be the material used to support the argument being developed. This type of information identifies the specific literary devices being explored and examines how and why the specific details of the literature are working to express the idea or theme you will present in your analysis. Various types of details from the text lend ***concrete*** support to the development of the central idea of your literary analysis essay. These details add credibility to the point you are developing.

Once you have identified a general claim and the objective information to support it, think about how the parts relate to one another and how they relate to the development of the deeper meaning or theme. This phase will help you to narrow your focus and craft your argument. Ask questions about how the individual elements of the work relate to a specific theme or overall effect. The questions you ask will be specific to the topic and work you selected, but some general examples are:

- Which literary device are you exploring?
- How is the literary device being used?
- What impact does this literary device have on the development of the text?
- Which evidence is present to support your interpretation of the impact?

For help constructing your argument, visit our Thesis Statement, Introduction, Conclusion and other literary handouts.

The Parts: Where They Go and How They Work

The Title

It is very important to choose a title for your literary analysis that is different from the title of the literary work being explored. It is also important not to call it "Literary Analysis of [title]." Instead, it is essential that you give your essay a title which is descriptive of the approach you are taking in your paper. Try to get the reader's attention by providing a glimpse into what the paper is going to do. For example, will it examine or explore? Are you stating that the text is an allegory or satirical representation of something or someone? An example of a strong title might be "The Odysseys of Max and Mickey: Imagery and the Immigrant Experience in Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen* and *Where the Wild Things Are*."

The Introduction and Thesis Statement

The thesis can be described as the main point, central argument, or the focus of the paper, but more than that, it can often give some indication as to what proof you intend to use and the order in which that proof may be presented in the body of the essay. Your thesis statement should be a clear and direct claim and should entice your audience to read further. Each subsequent paragraph in the body of your paper should support your thesis statement and prove your claim. For more information on Introductions and Thesis Statements, see the Tutoring Center's Introduction and Thesis Statement handouts.

Organization and Essay Structure

As with other types of academic writing, a literary analysis should adhere to the introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion model. *Your argument* and *your voice* must carry the weight in a literary analysis paper. Therefore, avoid plot summary, and construct a specific thesis statement that conveys a claim that you will prove in your body paragraphs using textual evidence. Each paragraph must include topic sentences, and these topic sentences, as well as the content of each paragraph, must support the thesis statement. Even if you incorporate research in your paper, be sure that it supports *your own argument* and does not overtake your voice and your position.

Writing Style and Voice

Use formal, academic diction (word choice) in a literary analysis. Therefore, write in the third person. First person (I,

me, our, we, etc.) and second person (you, your) are too informal for academic writing, and most literature professors prefer students to write in third person. Refer to your specific assignment for exact guidelines from your instructor.

The Literary Present

Literary works are considered to exist in the present tense. As a result, in academic writing, it is expected that you will write a literary analysis in the present tense.

Differentiation between Speaker and Author

Often in literature, the speaker is not the author. One aspect of literary analysis involves exploring the relationship between author and speaker. Carefully analyze point of view and tone, and consider the impact of the text's construction. Looking closely at the role of the speaker can help readers to understand how the text is working.

Questions to consider when exploring the role of the speaker:

- What "person" is the piece written in?
- Is the narrator omniscient (does the narrator know the thoughts and feelings of all other characters even if they have not been expressed)?
- Is the narrator an active part of the story, or are events being expressed from outside the immediate action?
- How can the author's choices regarding the role of the speaker or narrator affect the characters in the story?

Using Textual Evidence: Integrating Quotations and Proper Citations Effectively

Always introduce the text in the introduction. Give a clear, full reference to the work and its author somewhere in your introductory paragraph.

Throughout your literary analysis, use the correct format for referring to the work you are discussing. The titles of short stories, poems, and essays should be placed in quotation marks; the titles of novels, plays, films, and TV shows should be italicized.

Poem- "My Last Duchess"
Play- *Antigone*
Short Story- "The Secret Lion"
Movie- *Forest Gump*
Novel- *Pride and Prejudice*
Television show- *The Simpsons*

Use quotations sparingly. Remember that quotations are meant to support *your* argument. Therefore, saturating your paper with overuse of quotations will shift the reader's focus away from your ideas. Use only relevant quotations to support your claims, and limit quoting to key statements and ideas.

Integrate quotations smoothly. When you use quotations, work them into your writing as smoothly as possible. This is often referred to as embedding or "sandwiching" quotes. To do so, pay attention to style and punctuation. Use "signal phrases," such as, "according to…" or "Gordon writes…" to introduce a quotation. It is best not to end a paragraph with a quotation. Your own interpretation or analysis should always follow a quotation because, again, your points are the central focus of this type of writing. See the following examples of in-text quotations and citations:

Example 1:
In her essay "The Ghosts of Ellis Island," Mary Gordon observes, "The minute I set foot upon the island I could feel all that it stood for: insecurity, obedience, anxiety, dehumanization, the terrified and careful deference of the displaced" (392). Gordon uses vivid imagery to blend the historical perspective of the immigrant experience with her personal point of view that these new arrivals suffered a sense of profound dispossession.

Work Cited

Gordon, Mary. "The Ghosts of Ellis Island." *The Writer's Presence: A Pool of Readings*. 3rd ed. Ed. Donald McQuade and Robert Atwan. New York and Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

1. Introduce the quote to provide context for the reader.
    - Include the title and author if you are using the source for the first time.
    - Use a "signal phrase" to introduce the quote (author's name + verb).

2. Direct Quotations and Paraphrasing
    - Use a direct quote when an author writes in specialized or particularly powerful language and when such textual evidence enhances your paper's argument.
    - Be precise. Do not use a quote from an outside source (secondary source) if it is not well written or if you can state the point more clearly in your own words. In that case, you might summarize or paraphrase the author's ideas. If you summarize or paraphrase, you must still cite the source to credit the author. Refer to the Tutoring Center's Avoiding Plagiarism handout for additional paraphrasing tips.
    - Be sure to use proper punctuation for all quotations and citations. See the box below for detailed explanation of punctuation rules.
    - You can make use of paraphrase and summary when you need the details of the original piece, but not necessarily the words of the original. Paraphrase to put someone else's words into your own words. **Paraphrasing will require a citation.** It is important that the author's ideas remain intact, even if you present that message in your own words.

3. Your Analysis / Interpretation of the Quote
    - Explain and discuss how the quoted material is significant. Relate the quote to **your purpose** in your paper.
    - Demonstrate that this quote serves to make a particular point in your argument.

Example 2:
The following excerpt is from Jill May's article, "Theory and textual Interpretation: Children's Literature and Literary Criticism."

Young readers can unconsciously understand the signs and codes placed in their illustrations and texts. For instance, Marilyn Apseloff explains, "Children can pore over the pictures and create their own narratives for what is happening beyond the rhymes…" (qtd. in May 85).

Work Cited

May, Jill P. "Theory and Textual Interpretation: Children's Literature and Literary Criticism." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association.* 30.1 (1997): 81-96. Print.

RESOURCE 4

Writing a Critical Essay about Literature

(AKA: Your English teacher told you to stop summarizing and start analyzing)

So you have been given an assignment to write an essay about a piece of literature. This assignment may have been called a "critical literature essay," an "analysis," a "critical analysis" or by one of many other frustrating terms. The most important thing to remember is that you **will not summarize** what has happened in a literary work **but analyze** it. You will write "critically." For the purpose of this handout, we will pretend that you must write a critical analysis of the Wizard of Oz. (Yes, it was a book before it was a movie!)

The idea behind **critical analysis** of literature is to write an essay that explains **how a work demonstrates its themes.**

So what exactly is critical writing?

To write **critically** means to actually think about what a piece of literature means and find a way to express what it says to you. You must "consider" the work, form opinions about what you have read, and think about how the ideas in the work connect to the world in a larger way.

In your paper, you will most likely discuss how certain literary techniques are used to convey specific ideas. You will not rate how good or bad an author is. You will discuss *what a piece means* and *how it achieves its effect.* To write critically, you must provide analysis of specific points. You will explain how the events (quotes, actions, speech, examples, etc.) demonstrate themes and ideas. In the following paragraph, the essay writer explains what the ruby slippers represent in an example of **critical analysis:**

"The red ruby slippers represent Dorothy's untapped power. She wears the shoes throughout the entire story, never understanding that she could have used them all along to go home. The Good Witch, Glinda, points out what Dorothy hasn't realized when she says, "You've had the power all along." Dorothy, like her friends the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion, was always able to solve her own problems but never looked inside herself to do it. When she taps her feet together, she takes control and uses her own resources."

Notice that in this **analysis,** the author uses examples and quotes to support his point. (That the ruby slippers represent Dorothy's untapped power.) The author does not just present quotes separately; he works them smoothly into grammatical sentences that show how they function in the story. The essay writer also uses dependent clauses: "When she taps her feet together..... (plus your opinion of what this action means)" to show what ideas a specific example from the story demonstrates. He doesn't just tell what happens. He uses a topic sentence to clearly explain that the paragraph will *discuss* the meaning of the slippers.

To "**summarize**" is to restate the main points and events in a condensed way.

Example of **summary:** "Dorothy is a farm-girl from Kansas. Dorothy is unhappy in Kansas, and when a tornado comes along, her house gets sucked up into it and she ends up in a magical land called "Oz.". Her house lands on a witch, killing her and causing everyone to think she is a witch, too. When she wakes up the first day in Oz, a good Witch approaches her and gives her a pair of ruby slippers. Then she sets off on a yellow brick road to find the Wizard...."

But what's wrong with summarizing?

You **can't** write like this, because this it only tells what happens in the story. Although you will have to **discuss** the actions/plot of the story, **you will not merely restate** what happens.

Approaching the assignment

Here we go. You have to start somewhere. Don't go into this blindly.

1. Make sure that you have **thoroughly read over the handout** for the specific assignment. Take notes on it; circle/underline what you know must be included in the essay, and ask your professor to explain anything you are unclear about. (The suggestions on this handout are meant to be general supplements to what your professor has asked you to do. If anything directly conflicts, follow the instructions of your professor.)

2. **Review** any **literary terms** mentioned in the essay assignment. Read up on the terms wherever they occurred in your textbook or check the glossary.

3. **Read the piece** of literature **more than once** (if it is a novel or long play, you should at least re-read the sections you feel will be important to your paper.) Take notes in the margins. (News flash... if you sell your book back, it will bring a "used" price whether or not you write in it.) Ask questions. Flag pages or passages that relate to your topic and/or that interest you.

4. If you have a choice, **choose a literary work that you** feel you generally **understood.** You should have a good grasp of what the themes are. The **themes** are the major ideas expressed by the work. When someone asks you, "What was the book about?" You might be tempted to say "A farm-girl named Dorothy." However, that can't be a theme; it's not an idea. Themes are like lessons or values. So, you might say the theme is, "Finding your own power," or "There's no place like home." Those are themes that can be worked with. Maybe you think the theme is friendship or cooperation. That's ok. There are many themes to any one work. Your job is to pick one and explain how it is presented.

5. Try to **choose one aspect** of the work **to focus on.** If you professor has assigned a topic such as "Discuss Dorothy's character development in the Wizard of Oz," or "Analyze how the ruby slippers function as a symbol," then you will simply start-there and figure out what you personally think the text is saying about those issues. But if you have been given no specific *topic, you will have to narrow your thoughts down to one area.*

Beginning the writing process

Ok. Now you are ready to write. You can start with a specific thesis like "The ruby slippers represent Dorothy's untapped power" or a general idea like "Dorothy needs to be more confident," or just a topic such as "the ruby slippers." You do not have to know exactly what you are going to say when you start writing. Be prepared to revise and reorganize. Face facts: you're not going to be able to just write this in one draft on the computer.

If you have trouble getting started or finding enough to say, you can do all, any, or none of the following:

1**. Outlining:** You can write an outline and plan what topics you want to cover to prove a specific point. This is more easily done if you have taken lots of notes in your book as you read the piece. You might Write down topic sentences for each paragraph and list possible examples.

2. **Freewriting:** You can just start freewriting on the topic given by the professor, or, if no topic was given, on whatever interested you. As you write, don't censor yourself. Just get out your ideas in rough sentences. Ask questions. Complain. Make connections. It's ok to write "Why didn't Dorothy ever stop whining?" or "That stupid dog annoyed me," or "The wizard was a total fraud just like all politicians." When you are done freewriting, look for all the spots where you had a strong opinion. The best ideas will come from your strongest opinions. Now what you have to do is prove your point by finding examples and support in the text.

3. **Clustering:** You can write down all sorts of ideas, phrases and examples on a piece of paper and then use circles or arrows to figure out how they connect. Often clustering leads to an outline. The Writing Center has handouts on clustering.

4. **Starting without an intro:** If you are stuck for a specific thesis or intro, but have some ideas to write about, don't agonize over the intro. You can figure that out later after'you see where your ideas have lead you. As you write the paper, your opinions may change somewhat. That's ok. Just make sure, when you are done, that all the points you made relate to you thesis; change your thesis and revise your introduction if you have to.

Things you might not know about writing a critical English paper

1. It should be in **MLA format.** Find a handbook, use a library handout, or review a sample paper to find out what MLA format is. An infinite number of monkeys typing out an infinite number of essays might randomly hit upon MLA in ten thousand years. You won't. So:

-Use Times New Roman font, 12 point, and double-space throughout.

—After each quote, put the page number in parenthesis. For novels and short stories, use page numbers. For poetry, use line numbers. For drama, use the act and scene numbers as well as line numbers. If the poem or play doesn't provide these things, use page numbers instead.

—Use the correct heading: Your name, the professor's name, the course, and the date in. the upper left hand corner.

2. It should be written in the **present tense.** Yes, really. Most likely the book or story was originally in the past tense. That**'s** not important. Write your essay as if the piece of literature and its characters have always existed and will exist forever. Ex: "When Dorothy taps her shoes together, it shows that..."

3. **It should not go in chronological order.** That means that your paper should not move in order through the literature. The reason for this is A: this will cause you to fall into summary. B: You are analyzing the work and should organize the paper into logical points and topics. If you are writing about the ruby slippers, you will not start at the beginning, describe how Dorothy acquired them, then move on to where she wears them, and then describe what she does with them in the end. Instead, you will organize by topic. For example you might spend half of the paper discussing what the slippers symbolize to all the munchkins and witches, and then the second half explaining how they come to represent Dorothy's own resources. The only exceptions to this are when you write an explication of a poem; then you go in order line by line.

4. You must **assume that the audience** (your professor or other students) **is familiar with the work.** This is why you will not summarize or tell what happened in the story. Your job is to prove your opinion about ***how*** *the author and/or literature* ***present themes.*** Assume that the reader already knows **what** happens, but not **why.** You will not tell the reader that a witch attacked Dorothy, but that the witch who attacked Dorothy was a symbol of all Dorothy**'s** fears.

5. **You will not rate** how well or poorly the author has done his/her job. That is the topic of a review. You are writing literary analysis. You will describe **how and why** certain techniques are used. You will analyze the effects of the author**'s** techniques. You will not give your opinion about whether or not it was a good story/poem/play. You can, if you wish, point out things that are inconsistent, effective, confusing, or contradictory, etc. But that is only as a side point to describing/analyzing the ideas presented by the work.

General tips

1. Mention the author, title, general themes, and thesis in your intro statement, but don't use examples in it.
2. Explain how the literary techniques convey ideas, but don't define literary terms in your essay.
3. Work all quotes smoothly into grammatical sentences that explain how and why the quote supports your thesis. Don't begin paragraphs with quotes.
4. Don't discuss the fact that you are writing a paper. Just state your points and prove them.
5. Don't repeat "in the story" over and over. Your professor knows the context already.
6. Use topic sentences in each paragraph. The topic sentence should link the examples in the paragraph to your general thesis/point.
7. Restate and reword your thesis while providing some fresh insight in your conclusion. Don't just restate the intro.
8. Print out your paper and read it slowly before handing it in. Read it out loud if possible.
9. Don't say "I" in the essay, and say "the reader" or "the audience" instead of "you."

(Use the following summary and excerpt if you haven't read the novel or don't have the novel with it. You may need it for your group discussion.)

After reading from chapter 21 to 26 of *The Catcher in the Rye*, read the following summary to refresh your memory of the events that have unfolded so far. *(Adapted from Sparksnotes)*

Holden sneaks into his family's apartment and finds Phoebe sleeping peacefully in D.B.'S room. As he watches Phoebe sleep, he reads through her schoolbooks. He enjoys reading the notes to friends, the curious questions, and the random imaginative jottings she has scribbled on the pages. When he finally wakes Phoebe, and she is overjoyed to see him. Bursting with energy, she talks feverishly about one thing after another: her school play, a movie she has just seen, a movie D. B. is working on, a boy at school who bullies her, and the fact that their parents are at a party and won't come home until later. But upon realizing that Holden is home two days early and must have been kicked out of school, she repeats that their father will "kill" him and covers her head with a pillow.

Holden tells Phoebe all the things he hates about school. She responds by accusing him of hating everything and challenging him to name one thing he likes. He finally tells her that he likes Allie, and she reminds him angrily that Allie is dead. She asks what he wants to do with his life, and his only answer is to mention the lyric, "If a body catch a body comin' through the rye." Holden says that he imagines a gigantic field of rye on a cliff full of children playing. He wants to stand at the edge of the cliff and catch the children when they come too close to falling off—to be "the catcher in the rye." Phoebe points out that Holden has misheard the words—the actual lyric, from the Robert Burns poem, "Coming Thro' the Rye," is "If a body meet a body coming through the rye."

Holden leaves Phoebe's room for a moment to call Mr. Antolini, an English teacher he had at Elkton Hills. Mr. Antolini is shocked that Holden has been kicked out of another school and invites Holden to stay the night at his house. Holden then goes back into Phoebe's room and asks her to dance. After a few numbers, they hear their parents' coming home. Holden lets Phoebe know of his plan to leave New York and move out west alone. She loans him the Christmas money she'd been saving, and he leaves for Mr. Antolini's. On the way out, he gives Phoebe his red hunting hat.

When Holden arrives at Mr. Antolini's, Mr. Antolini and his wife have just wrapped up a dinner party in their apartment. Holden takes a seat, and the two begin talking. As Mrs. Antolini prepares coffee, Mr. Antolini inquires about Holden's expulsion. Holden reveals that he disliked the rules and regulations at Pencey Prep. Mr. Antolini gently challenges Holden, who then becomes uncomfortable. But Mrs. Antolini cuts the tension, bringing coffee for Holden and Mr. Antolini. After this break, Mr. Antolini tells Holden that he is worried about him because he seems primed for a major fall, a fall that will leave him embittered against the rest of the world. When Holden becomes defensive, Mr Antolini tells Holden that if he applies himself in school, he will learn that many men and women have been similarly disturbed and troubled by the human condition, and he will also learn a great deal about his own mind. Finally, Holden is unable to suppress a yawn. Mr. Antolini chuckles and lets Holden go to sleep. Suddenly, Holden wakes up; he feels Mr. Antolini's hand stroking his head. Holden believes Mr. Antolini is making a homosexual advance and hurries out of the apartment.

After leaving Mr. Antolini's, Holden goes to Grand Central Station and spends the night sleeping in the waiting room. The next day, he walks up and down Fifth Avenue, watching the children and feeling overwhelmed. Every time he crosses a street, he feels like he will disappear, so each time he reaches a curb, he calls to Allie, pleading with his dead brother to let him make it to the other side. He decides to leave New York, hitchhike west, and never go home or to school again.

He goes to Phoebe's school and writes her a note telling her to meet him at the Museum of Art so he can return the money she lent him. Phoebe arrives at the museum and begs Holden to take her with him. They walk to the zoo. After looking at some animals, they walk to the park, now on the same side of the street, although still not quite together. They come to the carousel, and Holden convinces Phoebe to ride it. He sits on a park bench, watching her go around and around. They have reconciled; he is wearing his red hunting hat, and suddenly he feels so happy he thinks he might cry.

Holden concludes his story by refusing to discuss what happened after his day in the park with Phoebe, although he does say that he went home, got sick, and was sent to the rest home from which he now tells his story. He says he is supposed to go to a new school in the fall and thinks that he will apply himself there, but he doesn't feel like talking about it. He wishes he hadn't talked about his experiences so much in the first place, even to D. B., who often comes to visit him in the rest home. Talking about what happened to him makes him miss all the people in his story.

Reading Selection, from Chapter 24

"Yes. Sure," I said. I did, too. "But you're wrong about that hating business. I mean about hating football players and all. You really are. I don't hate too many guys. What I may do, I may hate them for a little while, like this guy Stradlater I knew at Pencey, and this other boy, Robert Ackley. I hated them once in a while--I admit it--but it doesn't last too long, is what I mean. After a while, if I didn't see them, if they didn't come in the room, or if I didn't see them in the dining room for a couple of meals, I sort of missed them. I mean I sort of missed them."

Mr. Antolini didn't say anything for a while. He got up and got another hunk of ice and put it in his drink, then he sat down again. You could tell he was thinking. I kept wishing, though, that he'd continue the conversation in the morning, instead of now, but he was hot. People are mostly hot to have a discussion when you're not.

"All right. Listen to me a minute now . . . I may not word this as memorably as I'd like to, but I'll write you a letter about it in a day or two. Then you can get it all straight. But listen now, anyway." He started concentrating again. Then he said, "This fall I think you're riding for--it's a special kind of fall, a horrible kind. The man falling isn't permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling. The whole arrangement's designed for men who, at some time or other in their lives, were looking for something their own environment couldn't supply them with. Or they thought their own environment couldn't supply them with. So they gave up looking. They gave it up before they ever really even got started. You follow me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

He got up and poured some more booze in his glass. Then he sat down again. He didn't say anything for a long time.

"I don't want to scare you," he said, "but I can very clearly see you dying nobly, one way or another, for some highly unworthy cause." He gave me a funny look. "If I write something down for you, will you read it carefully? And keep it?"

"Yes. Sure," I said. I did, too. I still have the paper he gave me.

He went over to this desk on the other side of the room, and without sitting down wrote something on a piece of paper. Then he came back and sat down with the paper in his hand. "Oddly enough, this wasn't written by a practicing poet. It was written by a psychoanalyst named Wilhelm Stekel. Here's what he--Are you still with me?"

"Yes, sure I am."

"Here's what he said: 'The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one.'"

He leaned over and handed it to me. I read it right when he gave it to me, and then I thanked him and all and put it in my pocket. It was nice of him to go to all that trouble. It really was. The thing was, though, I didn't feel much like concentrating. Boy, I felt so damn tired all of a sudden.

You could tell he wasn't tired at all, though. He was pretty oiled up, for one thing. "I think that one of these days," he said, "you're going to have to find out where you want to go. And then you've got to start going there. But immediately. You can't afford to lose a minute. Not you."
I nodded, because he was looking right at me and all, but I wasn't too sure what he was talking about. I was pretty sure I knew, but I wasn't too positive at the time. I was too damn tired.

"And I hate to tell you," he said, "but I think that once you have a fair idea where you want to go, your first move will be to apply yourself in school. You'll have to. You're a student--whether the idea appeals to you or not. You're in love with knowledge. And I think you'll find, once you get past all the Mr. Vineses and their Oral Comp--"

"Mr. Vinsons," I said. He meant all the Mr. Vinsons, not all the Mr. Vineses. I shouldn't have interrupted him, though.

"All right--the Mr. Vinsons. Once you get past all the Mr. Vinsons, you're going to start getting closer and closer--that is, if you want to, and if you look for it and wait for it--to the kind of information that will be very, very dear to your heart. Among other things, you'll find that you're not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior. You're by no means alone on that score, you'll be excited and stimulated to know. Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them--if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry." He stopped and took a big drink out of his highball. Then he started again. Boy, he was really hot. I was glad I didn't try to stop him or anything. "I'm not trying to tell you," he said, "that only educated and scholarly men are able to contribute something valuable to the world. It's not so. But I do say that educated and scholarly men, if they're brilliant and creative to begin with--which, unfortunately, is rarely the case--tend to leave infinitely more valuable records behind them than men do who are merely brilliant and creative. They tend to express themselves more clearly, and they usually have a passion for following their thoughts through to the end. And--most important--nine times out of ten they have more humility than the unscholarly thinker. Do you follow me at all?"

"Yes, sir."

He didn't say anything again for quite a while. I don't know if you've ever done it, but it's sort of hard to sit around waiting for somebody to say something when they're thinking and all. It really is. I kept trying not to yawn. It wasn't that I was bored or anything--I wasn't--but I was so damn sleepy all of a sudden.

"Something else an academic education will do for you. If you go along with it any considerable distance, it'll begin to give you an idea what size mind you have. What it'll fit and, maybe, what it won't. After a while, you'll have an idea what kind of thoughts your particular size mind should be wearing. For one thing, it may save you an extraordinary amount of time trying on ideas that don't suit you, aren't becoming to you. You'll begin to know your true measurements and dress your mind accordingly."

Then, all of a sudden, I yawned. What a rude bastard, but I couldn't help it!

Mr. Antolini just laughed, though. "C'mon," he said, and got up. "We'll fix up the couch for you."