

Academic Writing Guide: How to Write a Literary Analysis

What is a literary analysis?

A literary analysis is a critical analysis of a work of literature such as a poem, a play, a short story or a novel. A literary analysis starts with careful reading and examination of certain parts of the story in order to understand the whole story better.

The analysis may focus on literary elements such as setting, character, plot and theme. It may also focus on literary devices such as foreshadowing, point of view, irony, metaphor and symbolism. Your analysis will discuss why the elements and devices you choose to discuss are significant and meaningful to the story.

Organizing Your Literary Analysis

A literary analysis can be organized the same as a standard essay, with an introduction, a body and a conclusion. However, remember that a literary analysis will focus on how the literary elements and devices used in a piece of literature make the story special or significant, and you will need to support those points throughout your essay.

Your literary analysis will have a title that is not just the name of the author and title of the work you are analyzing. The title of your literary analysis will be broad enough to cover the major ideas in your paper.

The Introduction

Make sure that your introduction includes these elements:

- The introductory sentence should be a “hook” that catches your reader’s interest.
- Introduce your topic, issue or argument and also state the name of the author and the title of the work to be discussed.
- Give some background information that will explain why your topic of analysis is important or interesting.
- Provide a clear thesis statement.

The Body

Each paragraph in the body will focus on a different idea, but each of these ideas will support the thesis statement given in the introduction paragraph.

- Give some background or brief summaries of parts of the story and then provide your interpretation, analysis and/or explanation of why those parts contribute to the greater meaning or theme of the story
- Each paragraph should contain examples and relevant quotes that will support your analysis or argument.
- If you use ideas (paraphrases or direct quotes) from sources outside of the piece being analyzed, you must cite them.

The Conclusion

- Restate your thesis statement with different words.
- Synthesize the ideas from the body paragraphs.
- Don't introduce a new topic. However, make points that are more than just repeats of what you have written in the previous paragraphs.
- The conclusion should leave a final impression on your reader.

This handout was put together with help from:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/697/1>

<https://www.roanestate.edu/owl/writinglitanalysis1.html>

For additional help, please make an appointment with a Writing & Learning Centre Humanities specialist at: <https://alexander.mywconline.com/>