



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 components of the story in order to understand it as a whole.

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 to the broader story and its message.

Organizing Your Literary Analysis

A literary analysis can be organized like a standard essay, with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Your essay requires an argument to drive the writing forward. More specifically, “your essay must have a **central idea (thesis)**, it must have **several paragraphs** that grow systematically out of the central idea, and **everything in it must be directly related to the central idea and must contribute to the reader’s understanding of that central idea**” (Bucks Community College).

The Introduction

In your introductory paragraph, you’re moving from general (background information) to specific (thesis statement). 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 state the name of the author and the title of the work you are going to discuss.
- Give some background information on the story and/or the author that will explain why your topic of analysis is important or interesting.
- Provide a clear thesis statement at the end of the paragraph.

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.

- Start each paragraph with a topic sentence that explains what element or device you are going to discuss and the point you are making about it.
- Give some background or a brief summary of a part or parts of the story and then provide your interpretation, analysis, and explanation of why those parts contribute to the greater meaning or theme of the story.
- Each paragraph should contain examples and relevant quotes that support your analysis or argument. Include citations with page numbers.
- If you use ideas (paraphrases or direct quotes) from sources outside of the piece being analyzed, you must cite them. Give others credit for their work!

The Conclusion

In the concluding paragraph, your flow will be the opposite of the introduction—you are moving from specific (restated thesis) to general (broader commentary).

- Don't introduce any new topics or analysis. Begin with a restatement of your thesis in different words.
- Summarize the main ideas from your body paragraphs and explain why your analysis is significant to the broader subject/story.

This handout was put together with help from:

[Bucks County Community College](#)

[Purdue University](#)

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