

AP Literature: Writing a Critical Essay About Literature (A Recap)

What is it?

A literary analysis is an argumentative analysis about a literary work. Although some summary is needed within the argument of a literary analysis, the objective is not to write a report about a book or story. Instead, a literary analysis discusses a writer's interpretation of a text through careful examination of the author's choices within the text: word choice, themes, motifs, as well as many other literary devices. The writer uses portions of the text, as well as his or her reasoning, to demonstrate how the evidence

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."

So how should my writing look?

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 (about "The Wizard of Oz"), 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.

Formatting a Literary Analysis

Literary analysis papers are typically written using MLA citation style formatting guidelines. For your analysis, you will need to include:

- a strong thesis statement
- an explanation of quotes
- a works cited page

Although there is not a specified length for each paragraph (or the number of paragraphs for that matter) below are tips for writing success:

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 teacher 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. Don't say "I" in the essay, and say "the reader" or "the audience" instead of "you."

Comparative Analysis of Poe and Jackson

Due: Saturday, May 16

In an essay of between 1100 and 1300 words, (roughly 4-5 pages double-spaced NOT including the works cited) write an original analysis on our gothic literature study.

Prompt

Compare Poe and Jackson's use of gothic elements and suspense in their fictional works. Determine how each author creates suspense through the use of any of the following techniques: setting, tone, mood, imagery, diction, direct/ indirect characterization, thematic elements, symbols, and/or foreshadowing.

For this essay you should make reference to at least two of Poe's assigned poems *or* short stories along with "The Haunting of Hill House". (A minimum of 3 literary works being compared.)

Things to consider as you formulate your analysis:

- What approach/ technique is more effective in truly creating suspense within the story?
- Poe's works came first and were a new concept for the time. How did Jackson expand on his concept of gothic literature? How has this genre evolved and maintained its relevancy in today's times?
- These works are roughly 75-175 years old. How are the ideas presented still relevant for modern readers?
- Poe's works were shorter while Jackson's is a novel. Does that have any bearing in elongating the suspense?
- One author is a male while the other is female. Does that have any impact on the use of storytelling or thematic implications?

Your essay must contain an original analysis. By original I mean that this essay must be comprised wholly of your own individual words and ideas, not someone else's. If you do consult a website or other source, it **must** be cited. Outside sources should be at a minimum as I want to know what you think about and what you can find in the work you are analyzing.

Format:

- Include the following in the upper left-hand side of the first page: your name; a title for your paper; the number of words in your paper; the class name; the date
- Length: 1100 words minimum; 1300 words maximum. Word count must be included.
- Your essay must make use of proper grammar, diction, spelling, and style.
- Number each page with your last name in the upper right hand corner.
- Cite your quotes using MLA parenthetical citation style: i.e. (Jackson 120).
- Type your essay with double spacing and 1" margins; use 12 pt. Times New Roman font.
- You must include a works cited page with this assignment.

Citing multiple works by the same author:

For in-text citations: Include the author's name, the title of the work, and the line numbers referenced (unless you have already mentioned the line numbers as you introduce the quote)

Ex: (Poe, *Alone*, lines 13-15)

In the Works Cited: To cite two or more works by the same author, give the name in the first entry only. Thereafter, in place of the name, type three hyphens, followed by a period and the title. The three hyphens stand for exactly the same name as in the preceding entry. This sort of label does not affect the order in which the entries appear; works listed under the same name are alphabetized by title.

Ex:

Poe, Edgar Allan. "Alone." 1875. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46477/alone-56d2265f2667d>. Accessed 8 April 2020.

---. "Annabel Lee." 1849. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44885/annabel-lee>. Accessed 27 April 2020.

Essay Rubric

	Outstanding	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Unacceptable
Introduction/ Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduction grabs attention and provides meaningful context to a persuasive argument ○ Conclusion effectively restates the argument, but fresh language and meaningful insight leaves reader wanting more <p style="text-align: center;">10 9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduction sparks some interest and effectively introduces reasonable argument ○ Conclusion restates arguments, but uses new language and shows understanding of the big picture <p style="text-align: center;">8 7 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduction provides context for the argument but is obvious and/or basic ○ Conclusion restates arguments, but recycles previous statements verbatim <p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduction or conclusion does not flow with the argument of the paper ○ Introduction or conclusion contains blanket or vague statements; needs development to be effective <p style="text-align: center;">4 3 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No introduction and/or conclusion <p style="text-align: center;">1 0</p>
Thesis	Argument is clearly articulated and persuasive, contains an original facts. <p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	Thesis presents reasonable facts, argument is clear and focused <p style="text-align: center;">4</p>	Thesis is a plausible argument; contains a legitimate fact, but somewhat broad/ basic <p style="text-align: center;">3</p>	Thesis demonstrates misunderstanding of the topic <p style="text-align: center;">2</p>	Thesis not evident; thesis is a fact or plot summary; thesis not in correct position <p style="text-align: center;">1 0</p>
Topic Sentences and Transitions	Topic sentences contribute to the highly persuasive nature of the argument <p style="text-align: center;">10 9</p>	Topic sentences articulate precise argument; logically linked to thesis <p style="text-align: center;">8 7 6</p>	Topic sentences are present and make an argument connected to the thesis; however, ideas are obvious and basic <p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	Topic sentences are not linked to the thesis Topic sentences show misunderstanding or prompt or text <p style="text-align: center;">4 3 2</p>	Topic sentences not evident ○ Topic sentences are facts or summaries <p style="text-align: center;">1 0</p>
Evidence	You have chosen, for the most part, the best evidence to support your point ○ Evidence is highly persuasive and effective in supporting your argument <p style="text-align: center;">10 9</p>	Your evidence is believable and convincing and supports your argument <p style="text-align: center;">8 7 6</p>	Evidence is present, but superficial <p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	Evidence chosen does not support thesis/topic sentences ○ Textual evidence is irrelevant <p style="text-align: center;">4 3 2</p>	Little or no evidence; <p style="text-align: center;">1 0</p>
Focus & Content	Sharp, distinct focus; substantial, specific, and/or illustrative content; sophisticated, mature ideas are particularly well developed and supported by research. <p style="text-align: center;">10 9</p>	Clear focus; specific, illustrative, and balanced content reasonably supported by research and quote citations. <p style="text-align: center;">8 7 6</p>	Adequate focus, but unbalanced content; more analysis needed as well as sources for research and topic expansion. <p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	Essay contains too much research information without analysis or commentary; essay is not effectively balanced of research and student analysis. <p style="text-align: center;">4 3 2</p>	Absence of focus and relevant content; content doesn't "fit" thesis nor does it have research to support. <p style="text-align: center;">1 0</p>
Analysis	Creative/original ideas and insights; extensive commentary, refreshing; goes beyond obvious and basic commentary <p style="text-align: center;">10 9</p>	Analysis is believable and convincing, a few assertions may lack specific examples, but assertions are clearly connected to the argument <p style="text-align: center;">8 7 6</p>	Analysis supports your argument, but ideas are obvious and basic <p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	Ideas lack development; misunderstanding of prompt or text; illogical argument; <p style="text-align: center;">4 3 2</p>	Analysis not present simply plot summary ○ Analysis does not address the prompt <p style="text-align: center;">1 0</p>
Style, Citations, Vocabulary & Sentence Structure	Sophisticated vocabulary; sentence variety; quotations are smoothly blended with citations readily used. <p style="text-align: center;">10 9</p>	Effectively blends direct quotation with explanatory words and phrases to introduce the quotation and facilitate narrative flow; still attempting advanced vocabulary <p style="text-align: center;">8 7 6</p>	Blends quoted material smoothly; but sentence structure lack variety-basic and obvious; attempts to incorporate more advanced vocabulary <p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	Problems with sentence clarity, redundancy; some quotes stand alone; some vague sentences; little use of class vocabulary or sentence variety or citations. <p style="text-align: center;">4 3 2</p>	Serious problems with coherence and sentence clarity; most sentences need revision; most quotes stand alone and lack introduction/ connection to the paper <p style="text-align: center;">1 0</p>
Mechanics and Usage	Perfect! (or 1 or 2 minor errors)	Effective punctuation and MLA; close to perfect	Minor problems with coherence, grammar, spelling, punctuation, but does not interfere with the understanding	Several distracting problems with spelling, grammar, punctuation, coherence; citations incorrect	Major spelling, grammar, punctuation errors; distracts from understanding;

X2	10 9	8 7 6	of paper 5	4 3 2	citations non existent 1 0
MLA: In-Text Citations	All sources are accurately documented in the proper MLA format (all quotes and paraphrased facts). Balance of sources with no over-reliance of one source; sources cited more than once 10 9	Almost all sources are documented, but a few are not in the desired format. Sources are decently balanced. 8 7 6	most sources are documented, but many are not in the desired format and there is a large reliance on certain sources over others. 5	Several sources lack proper documentation and are used more than others. 4 3 2	Sources are not accurately documented, and MLA format is not followed properly 1 0
Word Count	Adheres to the required word count and used class time appropriately to reach this requirement. 5	Adheres to the required word count, but could have used class time more appropriately to reach this requirement. 4	Does not adhere to the required word count (by at least 100 words) and used class time inappropriately. 3	Does not adhere to the required word count (by at least 200 words) and used class time inappropriately. 2	Does not adhere to the required word count (by at least 300 words) and used class time inappropriately. 1 0

Total: _____ / 100