

Tutoring Guide for Papers in Literary Analysis

The Assignment in General

Students have been assigned to write a critical analysis of a story or poem from several options. Students must interpret the text through the lens of one of the following particular interpretive approaches:

- New Critical
- Historical/Cultural
- Biographical
- Feminist

It's important to understand which lens the student is supposed to use to analyze the literary work because it affects not only perspective but also research. Tutors should be sure to ask questions regarding the required approach.

The Paper's Structure and Development

No matter which "lens" students use to write a literary analysis, each paper should have the following elements:

- Effective introduction and thesis statement
- Logically developed and fully supported body
- Effective Conclusion

Specifically, as you read the draft and discuss it with the writer, you can ask the following questions:

1. Does the thesis have depth? That is, does the thesis address aspects of the text(s) beyond the typical, universal themes accessible upon a first reading of the text?
2. Does the thesis account for the complexity of the text(s)?
3. Does the essay consider the subtleties in the text(s)?
4. Does the essay use textual support to illustrate and substantiate the thesis? Specifically, does the writer cite relevant, specific lines of narration and/or dialogue which help to support and develop the thesis? And are those lines interpreted clearly and logically according to the "lens" being used?
5. Does the essay use secondary sources to substantiate interpretations?
6. Are there major portions of the text(s) that the thesis does not account for? In other words, is the thesis focusing on such an obscure part of the text(s) that the writer can't see the forest for the trees?