

# Tutoring Guide for Papers in Literary Theory

## The Assignment in General

Students can choose to write about any character, symbol, theme, or other aspect of a given text (or texts, as the case may be). They then must analyze and interpret whatever they've chosen according to a particular literary theory.

## The Paper's Structure and Development

A typical literary theory paper follows this basic format, in this order:

- Introduction—it introduces the text(s) to be discussed, names the literary theory to be used to interpret the text(s), and provides the thesis of the essay. In short, this introduction should explain the issue, controversy, or problem to be tackled.
- The theory—the student must explain what theory she is using for the analysis and interpretation. In this way, she is setting up the lens through which the audience will look at the text(s). Examples of literary theories students might choose to use include Aristotle's theory of mimesis, Susan Bordo's idea of the double-bind, Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, Edward Said's theory of orientalism, Shelley's vision of the poet as prophet, or any other truthful explanation regarding how life works. This section of the paper is also meant to demonstrate to the professor the students' accurate and clear understanding of the theory being used. Therefore, if this section is confusing to read because it's convoluted, vague, or ambiguous, that problem should be pointed out!
- The analysis—the student must offer the analysis and interpretation that are consistent with the theory she's chosen to use. This section must focus on support from the primary text(s).
- Secondary Sources—the student must provide research from secondary sources to substantiate that her analysis is in fact a reasonable addition to the conversation surrounding the issue or problem mentioned above.
- Conclusion—it should wrap up the paper convincingly.

## Of Special Note

Overall, the essay worthy of the modifier "scholarly" is that which adds to the conversation about the text(s). In other words, the students' interpretation should be original and should not just be a regurgitation of class discussions or even a repetition of secondary source materials.