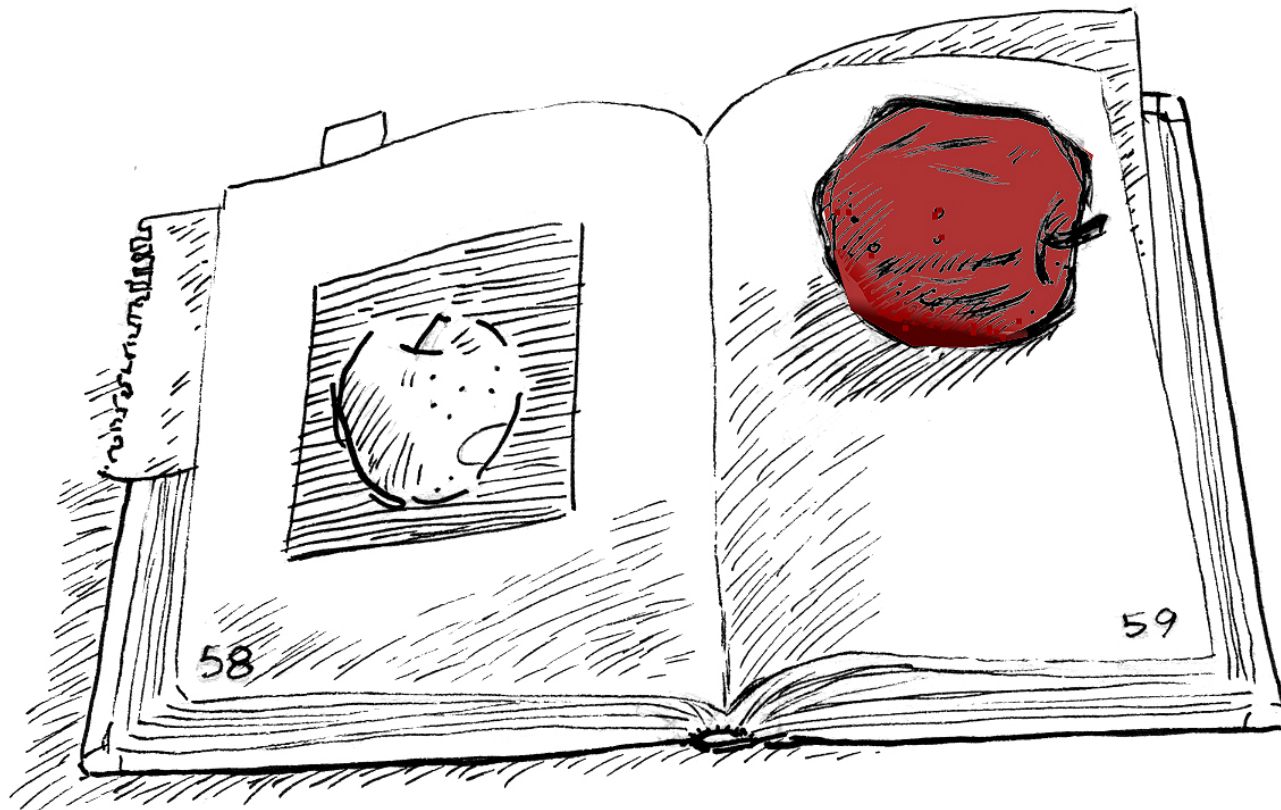# Critical Analysis & the Reading Process

# *introduction*

**Creative writing remains a focal point of our society**—it explains our diversity as humans and enables different ideas to be traded between people and cultures.

# *critical analysis*

**Examining past and current literature helps:**

- understand the creative process of an individual author or group of authors

- show the understanding of a specific culture

- show possible (dis)connection between the author and the culture

- develop new literature

# *critical analysis*

**Basic Principles of Analyzing a Passage or Story:**

- Create a thesis

- Describe what happens in the passage/story in brief terms

- Consider if there are any hidden meanings in the text

- Assess word choice

# critical analysis

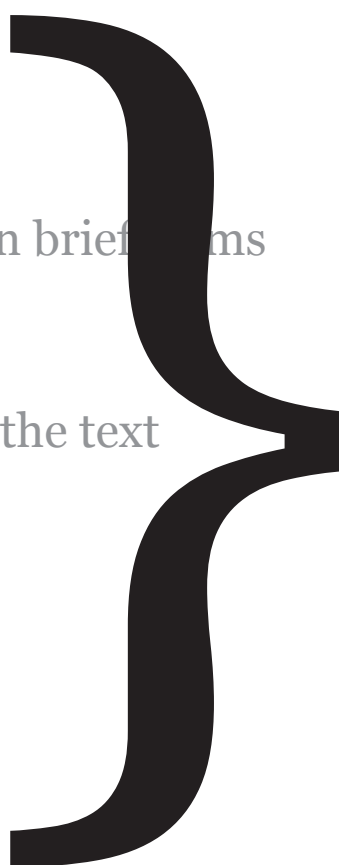**Basic Principles of Analyzing a Passage or Story:**

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}

Collectively, just on a basic level of comprehension, these elements represent the process individuals go through to clarify a story or poem to themselves.

# *critical analysis*

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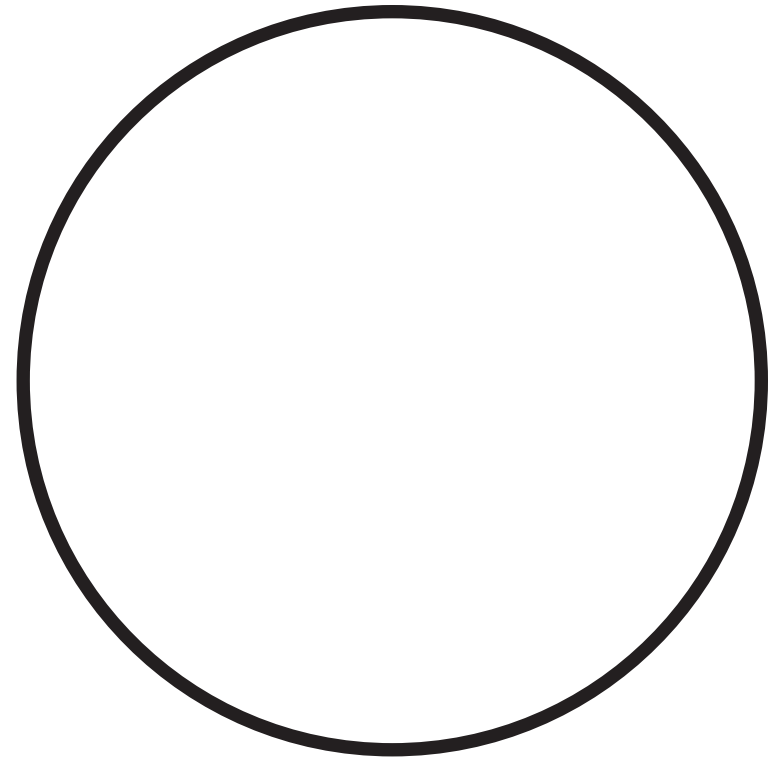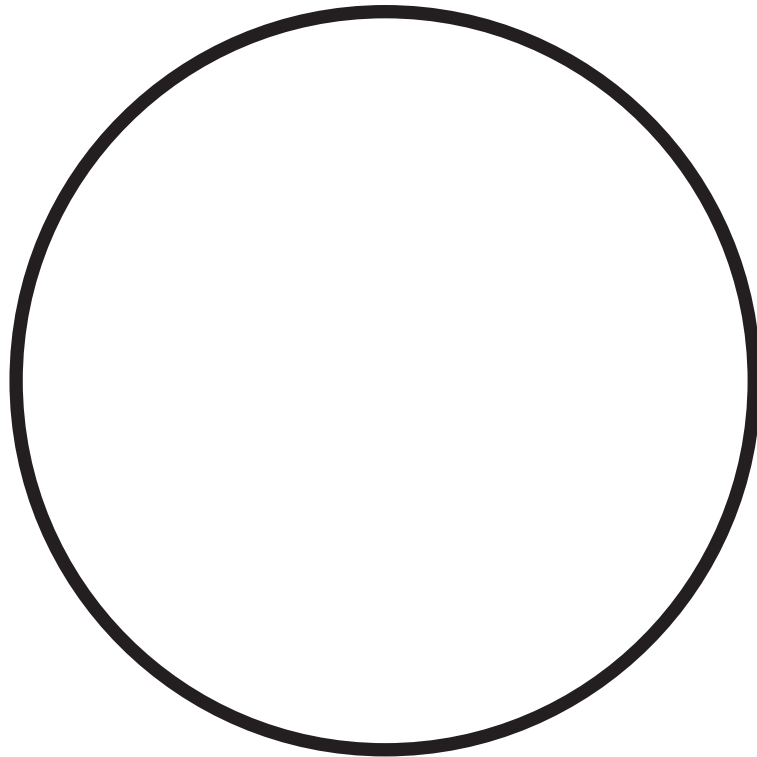


## *you* = *the text*

As students, the analytical process should be habitual for any course and for any reading assignment.

- This is what enables *you* to understand the *text*. You *become* the text.

# *assessing word choice*

*For example:*

In the "Cask of Amontillado" Edgar Allan Poe uses the specific word 'impunity.'

This deliberate choice does reflect back on the theme of the story.

As a reader you should ask yourself:

> *Why* does Poe choose this one word for this one particular story?

> > *—or—*

> *How* does this wording affect the main theme?

*impunity*: to escape punishment for a crime committed

# Guidelines for Reading

**Elements Which Enhance Developments of Stories:**

1. characters' actions

2. characters' intentions

}

3. plot rhythms— combination of protagonist's journey, flow of information

   and literary modes

4. story structure— also referred to as Freytag's Pyramid

5. points of view— or Narrative Voice

- *Always be aware of these elements within every story we read in the course.*

# You should read the material *three* times.

# *Guidelines for Reading*

# You should read the material *three* times.

• *Before writing an academic paper, it is important to read the chosen material more than just once.*

# First Reading

**The first reading acts on an *emotional* level.**

• Concentrate on the actions of characters and the basic plot.

• Try to enjoy the material as much as possible.


I. Read first for enjoyment, without interruption

    A. Notice the use of language and word play

    B. Consider the actions of the characters:

        • who is the protagonist and who is the antagonist?

    C. Note the setting and the atmosphere of the scene

II. Afterwards, as soon as possible, determine the emotional impact

    A. Do you have any unanswered questions?

    B. Did you like the story?

    C. Did you relate to any of the characters?

# *Second Reading*

**The second reading acts on an *analytical* level.**

- Likewise, material you may have missed on the first reading can be explored in greater detail.

- Resolve unanswered questions.

I. Concentrate on the plot details:

    A. To answer any possible questions

    B. To confirm what you already know

II. Determine:

    A. Journey theme: all protagonists go some form of journey

    B. Conflict type: all protagonists and antagonist have a conflicted relationship

    C. How do the elements affect the developments and actions of the characters?

# *Third Reading*

**The third reading specifically targets a higher level of *critical* analysis.**

• Since you can predict what will happen, you can analyze *in closer details*

  why characters act or react in the manner they do.

• Newer insights can be gained regarding the author's strategy and influences.


I.    It is important to be open to the entire work.

      A. consider how it relates to other readings

      B. discover what sets it apart from other writings

II.   Ask yourself what images and literary devices are used in the story.

III.  What is the author's main goal for telling me this story?

IV.   Who do the characters resemble?

V.    Ask yourself: where have I seen this situation before?

      What inspirations or obvious emulations did the author use?

# *Guidelines for Reading*

**What is important about number five**:

- Literature grows out of other literature. No idea is absolutely original—*nothing is original in the creative process*; borrowing from other established authors is frequent, consciously and subconsciously.

**intertextuality**: the reinvention, insertion of situations and conflicts in a new sequence of thought to present a new idea; creation of something new out of an older concept.

- *With a third reading, it is easier to spot intertextuality.*

# *intertextuality*

**The Top Four Literature which are referenced, reworked, reinvented :**

1. Biblical stories

2. Shakespearean plays

3. Greek/Roman myths

4. Fairy tales

*Why do you think this is the case?*

*What do these four types of writing share in common?*

Likewise, look for these emulations; they establish mood, atmosphere, scenery, and theme — consciously and *subconsciously*.

# Review of Reading Points

- The first reading acts on an *emotional* level.

- The second reading acts on an *analytical* level.

- The third reading targets a *higher level of critical* analysis.

# *Literary Devices & Terminologies*

- **plot:** main course of action

- **setting:** the landscape of the story

- **conflict:** clash of opposing views, needs, actions

- **protagonist:** main character; focal point of action

- **antagonist:** a person the protagonist struggles against, or competes with;

    an adversary

- **climax:** the ultimate scene of action; the decisive moment in a novel or play,

    results in the conclusion/resolution

- **subplots:** minor secondary story lines behind the scene of main action

# *Literary Devices & Terminologies*

- **points of view:** (voice/narration) thoughts and feelings which motivate story

- **irony:** an event deliberately contrary to what the reader expects

- **foreshadowing:** hints of a future development through elements of the story

- **motifs:** reoccurring symbols which appear throughout the story

- **paradox:** conflicting/contradictory statement

- **exposition:** establishment of setting, prepares the fictional world for reader

- ***in medias res***: latin: "in the middle of." Many short stories use this technique.