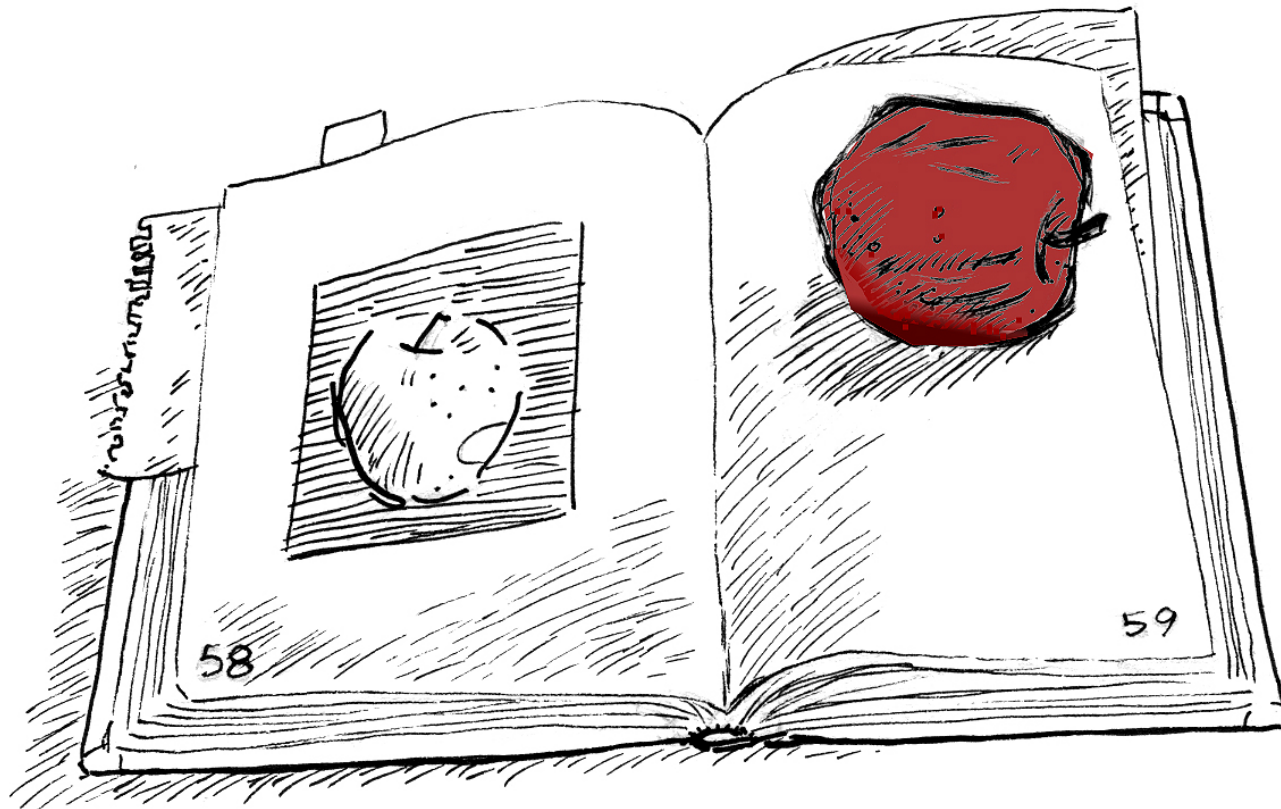


# Literary Criticism Overview

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# *Principles for Analyzing*

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- The paper must offer a thesis which shows a basic observation about the text.
- Every paragraph must offer a topic sentence relating back to thesis.
- Every paragraph must quote the primary source showing evidence
- Discuss what happens in the plot  
—and why it is significant to the work as a whole.
  
- Explain *why* a character is motivated to act in the manner depicted -or- explain *how* their motivations/actions are relevant to the plot itself:  
*For instance, why does Montresor entomb Fortunato alive, rather than just kill him?*
  
- Consider what is said, particularly subtleties of the imagery and the ideas expressed; are there any hidden meanings in the text?

# *Principles for Analyzing*

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- Assess how scenes are laid out:
  - > consider the word choice
  - > the ordering of ideas
  - > sentence structure
- How do these elements contribute to the theme of the story?
- Explain what the elements mean, tying your analysis of the plot back to the importance of the text as a whole.

In other words you are not **summarizing** plot.

In addition, your material will **not** relate **personal responses**.  
These are not reviews, nor are they book reports.

# *Principles for Analyzing*

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**There are three levels of literary appraisals.**

**01. Paraphrase:** helps clarify the meaning of the work when you quickly write out the intentions of the story or poem in your own words. This is a good technique as well to use after reading a story to make sure you understand the author's strategies. However, use it carefully. A full story can be paraphrased into two sentences.

# *Principles for Analyzing*

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**There are three levels of literary appraisals.**

## **01. Paraphrase**

**02. Explicate:** you deconstruct the work scene by scene, analyzing each set of images and word choice. You check for symbols, characters, narrator, and tones. Decide how these factor together.

# *Principles for Analyzing*

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**There are three levels of literary appraisals.**

**01. Paraphrase**

**02. Explicate**

**03. A critical analysis** you delve deeper into the text through the explication process. You focus on a specific image or word or symbol and then compare it to the meaning of the entire work as a whole. For instance again to use Poe's "Cask of Amontillado" the word *impunity* is used frequently throughout the piece.

Does this imply Montresor is trying to convince himself that he has no feelings of remorse for getting away with his crime?

# *Defense*

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Remember to always **back up your statements** with examples from the text itself **or** from another critic.

- Always cite evidence from primary source.

## **In this manner:**

1. you are proving your argument sound and defending your point

2. you are showing others agree with you

**or** (on the flip side) you can argue against another critic's opinion and show contradictory evidence.

# *Critical Analysis papers*

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## **Literary Analysis uses both persuasive & argumentative purposes:**

- papers must show a clear, concise thesis statement
- paper must defend the thesis utilizing evidence from primary source
  - > story itself is primary source
  - > critical, outside opinion (research) is secondary source
- always use present tense when discussing the action within a story or poem— even if the action is related to you by a narrator in past tense, *you always use present tense when discussing action in a story in your paper*



# *present tense*

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- When referring to a past author creating a work, always use present tense, even if the writer is deceased.

*example:*

Homer traditionally invokes a muse at the beginning of his epic *The Odyssey*.

- As well, whenever describing action in the text, or paraphrasing the text, use present tense, even if the information is told you in past tense.

*example:*

The scarlet letter is a punishment placed upon Hester's breast by the community and yet it is an extremely imaginative product of Hester's own needlework.

# Six Types of Analysis

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1. Response Essay—emotional reaction to work
2. Explication Essay—primarily for poetry analysis; break the poem apart line by line
3. Historical/Social/Cultural Analysis Essay—explore the background developments from a perspective of history, society, or culture of the times
4. Comparison-Contrast Essay—take two characters or two themes and compare and/or contrast them
5. Critical Analysis Essay—analyze a literary work according to a single principle or element within the story: characterization, theme, style, or technique
  - judge its effectiveness
6. Research Essay—a writing assignment which researches beyond the text itself
  - expands your understanding of the story
  - use library databases to find critics; show how their opinions fit your observations
  - paper should include elements of:  
Historical/Social/Cultural Analysis, Comparison-Contrast, and Critical Analysis

See *Literature and the Writing Process*, page 32 “Interpreting and Arguing.”

# What is a Thesis?

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## The thesis statement is:

- is the unifying force in the paper
- it is the point you are arguing; the thesis defines your position on a subject;  
your paper will provide convincing evidence to support the thesis
- a declarative statement, composed of one to two sentences

A thesis states a fact about your topic and your point of view on the topic:

topic + opinion + fact = thesis

Both Edgar Allan Poe and Charlotte Gilman successfully  
utilize common Gothic elements in their writing.

# *What is Evidence?*

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- Direct quotations from the material. (45%)

The majority of the paper is observing how a story operates  
*and then defending your views with quoted examples from the story.*

- *Brief* paraphrasing of action and details in story.

One or two sentences maximum of paraphrasing (25%)

- Other critics' opinions and theories. (15%)

- *Brief* summary. One or two sentences maximum of summary. (10%)

- Historical facts and events from the time period the piece was written (5%)

# *Literary Criticism Overview*

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## **Components for Analysis**

1. Interpretation of the Story
2. Basic Elements that Develop Fiction
3. Rhetorical Elements (*LWP*: p. 112)
4. Structure of the Story (*LWP*: p. 109-110)

# 1. Interpretation

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- **Interpretation:** determine the theme of the story  
(in other words, *not the topic* of the story).
- **Explain/show** how the plot developments contribute to the theme.
- **Identify** the literary devices at work within the story.

## 2. *Basic Elements that Develop Fiction*

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- **Theme:** main idea; focus of story
- **Plot:** basic patterns of unfolding events (see structure of story-below).
- **Characters:** actors within the story-line which include the narrator of a story
- **Point of View:** Narration or Voice
- **Setting:** landscape of story

# Characters

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## **Important to determine how the characters are presented:**

(LWP: p. 111)

- Round: three-dimensional personality-well developed and fleshed out
- Flat: limited qualities-one dimensional-all bad or all good-
- Dynamic: Grows and progresses to a higher level of understanding
- Static: Remains unchanged throughout the story

## **Examine:**

How does the author present a character to the reader?

How does the character view him/herself?

How does he/she act in the story?

How does he/she view other characters in the story?

How is he/she viewed by other characters?

How do other characters act in the story?

How does the author present other characters in the story?

*Answers to these questions will show the characterizations within the story.*



# Setting

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## **Determine if the following basic elements exist:**

- Time period
- Geographical location
- Historical and cultural influences
- Social
- Political
- Spiritual

*If any are not determinable, ask yourself why.*

*Make sure you are not overlooking something essential.*

Essential for establishing mood

May symbolize the emotional/mental state of characters

Impacts characters' motivations and/or options

### 3. *Rhetorical Elements*

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*Also referred to as Literary Devices; some of these we already covered*

- Every author utilizes these elements in an unique manner.
- Seeking the strategy used by an author helps develop your paper.
- Be able to identify the rhetorical elements in your reading to develop your paper.

### 3. *Rhetorical Elements*

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- **foreshadowing:** a clue or hint which suggests a plausible ending to story. The more obvious images help build suspense and can create a sense of irony.
- **tone:** controlled by the author's words choice and phrases, the tone supplies a sense of the writer's attitude towards a given situation or person.
- **mood:** similar to tone, mood is the atmosphere the author intends the work to offer the reader.
- **symbolism:** abstract ideas. These exist in plenty throughout any story or poem. As already mentioned, if you see a symbol, defend it with correct evidence.
- **irony:** multiple forms of irony. Poe uses this as a means of creating suspense.
- **figurative language:** descriptive phrasing and literary devices which embellish a work of fiction and poetry.

## 4. *Structure of the Story*

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(*LWP*: p. 109-110)

- how the plot develops within the beginning, middle and end of story
- important that you notice how the plot develops and transforms from the stages
- watch what changes, and what elements remain constant
- notice the types of conflict which appear throughout the story
- notice how characters transform ***or*** remain static