

Literary Criticism

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What is literary criticism?

Literary criticism concerns itself with the activities of studying, evaluating, and interpreting works of literature. This is different to, but dependant on the study of literary theory, which analyses literature in the context of a broader philosophical framework. Different literary

theories use different approaches when developing and substantiating an argument. Some theories concentrate on the reader's emotional or intellectual response to the text, some on aggregating the works of other critics, some focus solely on a close reading of the text and some analyse a work from a social, historical, gender or political perspective. Literary criticism then uses one or more of these literary theories to propose a persuasive argument about some aspects of the text. Literary criticism thus expresses the various ways that readers try to understand and respond to an author's work. In producing a piece of literary criticism, the critic's purpose is to broaden or challenge the reader's understanding to the text, and to present the critic's opinion on how the text informs the reader about the world that the reader lives in.

Why is literary criticism worth reading or writing?

Literary criticism sharpens the mind and enables a better understanding of how a writer's work affects a reader emotionally and intellectually. By analysing a wide range of literature texts, we can gain a better insight into the moral, social, religious, political, economic, historical and other aspects of our own behaviour and the way our society works can be obtained. Literary criticism provides the tools to study, evaluate, and interpret literary works like novels, short stories, and poems. The canon of existing literary criticism provides a rich source of material that can help frame your own point of view about a particular text or set of works. Different literary style encourages us to consider different viewpoints other than our own.

Forms of literary criticism

There are numerous different approaches to literary criticism. The following is by no means a comprehensive list (Purdue University, 2022):

- Moral Criticism, Dramatic Construction (~360 BC-present)
- Formalism, New Criticism, Neo-Aristotelian Criticism (1930s-present)
- Psychoanalytic Criticism, Jungian Criticism(1930s-present)
- Marxist Criticism (1930s-present)
- Reader-Response Criticism (1960s-present)
- Structuralism/Semiotics (1920s-present)
- Post-Structuralism/Deconstruction (1966-present)
- New Historicism/Cultural Studies (1980s-present)
- Post-Colonial Criticism (1990s-present)
- Feminist Criticism (1960s-present)
- Gender/Queer Studies (1970s-present)
- Critical Race Theory (1970s-present)
- Critical Disability Studies (1990s-present)

Historical-biographical criticism focuses on the author's historical context. This approach assumes that the significance of a particular piece of literature is inextricably linked to its historical context. This is not necessarily the historical context of the era that the writer is living in. For example, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, is placed in the first century BC of the Roman Empire. Superficially, then Shakespeare is telling a story of Ancient Rome and the characters in the work respond to one another as Romans not Elizabethan's (or at least the

Elizabethan view of what Roman's would have done in the first century BC). But Shakespeare is not writing in a vacuum and his audience is essentially an Elizabethan one, so, when considered in depth, critics evaluate Julius Caesar within the context of English literature, history, and culture of the late sixteenth century.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- When was text written and when was it published?
- What was the critical and public reception? What does this reception say about the standards of taste and the social and moral values at the time it was published or reviewed?
- To what extent does the work reflect differences from the ideas and values of its time?
- What influences in the writer's life does the work reflect? These might include people, ideas, movements or events.
- How much of the writer's actual life appears in the work? Have modifications of the actual events been made by the author in incorporating them in the text and for what possible purposes?
- What effects do these differences have on the effect of the text on its readership?
- Has the author revealed something about their personal thoughts, perceptions, or emotions in the work?

Example: tbd

Moral-philosophical criticism

Here the ethical merits of the author's work are the primary focus and the moral statements and judgments made by the characters and author in the text are the main concerns of the moral-philosophical critics.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- Does the theme of the work reveal an enduring truth?
- What rewards does the protagonist receive because of their actions? Are these rewards merited?
- What rewards does the antagonist receive because of their actions? Are these rewards merited?

Example: tbd

Sociological criticism

Sociological criticism evaluates literature based on its relationship to society. A knowledge of sociological theories is thus required when taking this approach. The effect that the author's work has on its audience within the society is the critic's primary concern together with the critic's view of the author's status in their society. An example of this approach would be Marxist criticism, which analyses whether a work supports or rejects oppression within a class system.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- How does the economic status of the characters affect the outcome of the story?
- Do the characters strive against the economic and political status quo, or do they manipulate it to their own ends?
- What social conditions does the writer depict in the text and what importance does this depiction play in the work? (These conditions might include poor education, poor health care, poor nutrition or inadequate opportunity)
- Does the work properly and fairly deal with the economic, social and political implications of its material?
- In what other ways is the work affected by economic and social issues. How should a consideration of today's modern economic and social setting influence the readers interpretation of the story?

Example: [A Marxist/Feminist Analysis of Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery'](#).

Psychoanalytic criticism

This approach is based on the idea that an author's unconscious thoughts are expressed through their work. The psychological desires and neuroses of the characters within the text are thus seen as an expression of the author's unconscious thoughts and the purpose of criticism is to analyse and evaluate these thoughts. Knowledge of the psychoanalytic theories of Jung, Freud and others is therefore relevant to this approach.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- Are there connections between the behaviour and motivations of characters in the text and our knowledge of an author's life?
- In what way do the characters, their actions, their relationships, and their motivations illuminate the mental world and imaginative life, or the actions and motivations of the author?
- How are the psychological motivations of its characters revealed by the use of its images, metaphors, and other linguistic elements in the text?
- How is the psychological mindset of its author revealed by the use of its images, metaphors, and other linguistic elements in the text?
- Are the motivations of literary characters explainable in terms of the concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis?

Example: [A Freudian Analysis of 'Erin McGraws 'A Thief''](#).

Formal criticism

Formalism compels readers to judge the artistic merit of literature by examining its formal elements, like language and technical skill. Formalism favours a literary canon of works that exemplify the highest standards of literature, as determined by formalist critics.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- How is the work organized? What is its structure? What is the nature of the beginning, how does it progress and how does it end? How is its plot related to its structure?
- How are the parts of the work related to the work seen as a whole? How are the individual parts related to one another?
- Who is the narrator? Are there multiple narrators? What are their points of view? How do they relate to each other and how are they revealed to the readers? What is the effect of the choice of narrator on the reader and the work? Is there a reason why the author selected the particular type of narration used?
- Who are the major and minor characters and how do they relate to one another? Has the author used the characters to represent particular themes or ideas?
- Where is the work set (in terms of time and place). How does the author make use of the setting and how does the author relate the setting to what we know of the characters and their actions? Is the setting symbolic? Is the setting also a character in the story?
- What tone is used by the author? How does the author describe, narrate, explain, or otherwise create the world of the literary work? What does this achieve from the reader's point of view? What images, similes, metaphors, symbols appear in the work? Why are they used, what is their function and what meanings do they convey?

Example: [On Literary Criticism: Looking into Noers Moths from the planes of light of New Critics, Russian Formalists and the Structuralists](#)

Herujiyanto Herujiyanto (2016) 'On Literary Criticism: Looking into Noers Moths from the planes of light of New Critics, Russian Formalists and the Structuralists', LLT journal (Online). Universitas Sanata Dharma, 17(1), pp. 42–50. doi: 10.24071/llt.v17i1.277.

New criticism

Led by Clench Brooks, John Crowe Ransom (critics) and T.S. Eliot (poet) this form of criticism emphasised the examination of the formal and structural elements of the text, rather than its moral or emotional components.

New criticism concentrates on an 'objective' evaluation of the text to identify its underlying form. Things like a text's use of imagery, metaphor, or symbolism within the text are of interest but matters outside the text such as biographical information about the author or contextual information about the environment the text is written in are not considered.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism are:

- **Character:** What is unique or interesting about the characters? Do the characters represent stereotypical tropes of the genre (such as the action hero, the anti-hero, the patriarchal father figure, the Madonna)? How do the characters interact? How do they evolve?
- **Setting:** What role does setting play? Does setting enhance tension within the work. Do any elements of the setting foreshadow the conclusion of the piece?
- **Plot:** Where is the source of conflict? How is the structural design of the scene used to be build, enhance or resolve tension within the plot.

- Point of View. What types of point of view are used. Are narrators omniscient or closed? Are they reliable or unreliable?

Example: [A Formalist Reading of Sandra Cisneros's "Woman Hollering Creek" , Sound in William Shakespeare's The Tempest by Skylar Hamilton Burris.](#)

[On Literary Criticism: Looking into Noers Moths from the planes of light of New Critics, Russian Formalists and the Structuralists](#)

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New Historicism

Here an understanding of the texts is obtained by viewing it in the context of other texts. The influence of economic, social, and political factors are the considered and the term "text," is interpreted flexibly. The Catholic Church could, for instance, be defined as a "text." The perspectives of other interpretive methods –particularly reader-response criticism, feminist criticism, and Marxist approaches may also be incorporated when interpreting a text.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism are:

- What social classes are depicted in the text? What are the roles of these classes in the story?
- How are the aspirations and conditions of these classes depicted?
- How is the conflict between the powerful, privileged classes and the subordinate, lower classes depicted - does this drive the tension in the story and the jeopardy of the characters forward?
- How does the historical context of the story and the social positions of the characters inform the reader about those characters' motivations?
- How do they social positions benefit or obstruct the characters' actions?

Example: <https://cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/theory/newhistoricism/index.html>.

Structuralism/Semiotics

This critical approach regards literature as a system of signs where meaning is constructed in a context. In this system words acquire meaning by being compared to other words and structures. A major theory associated with Structuralism was binary opposition. The theory of binary opposition plays an important role in Structuralism. This theory proposed that there are certain theoretical and conceptual opposites, which structure a given text. , often arranged in a hierarchy. Such binary pairs might include light/dark, old/young, male/female, rational/emotional, black/white etc.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- What patterns are evident in the text? Are these patterns similar to those in other texts?
- What binary oppositions are presented in the text? (e.g., masculine/feminine, old/young, light/dark, good/evil, natural/artificial, etc.)
- Are the binary oppositions used in a hierarchical way (e.g., is an old age more valuable than a young age, is light better than dark, etc.)? How is each part of the binary valued?

Example: [On Literary Criticism: Looking into Noers Moths from the planes of light of New Critics, Russian Formalists and the Structuralists](#)

Herujiyanto Herujiyanto (2016) 'On Literary Criticism: Looking into Noers Moths from the planes of light of New Critics, Russian Formalists and the Structuralists', LLT journal (Online). Universitas Sanata Dharma, 17(1), pp. 42–50. doi: 10.24071/llt.v17i1.277.

Post-structural criticism

A reaction to New Criticism, Post-structuralist literary criticism de-emphasised the ideas of structural and formal analysis and questioned the assumption that universal truths as reliant on the social structure that they occur within. Like structuralism, literature is viewed as a system of signs, but post-structural criticism rejects the Structuralist view there is an inherent meaning in a text. Instead, Post-structural criticism, takes the view that literature is inherently ambiguous and thus has no centre, nor a single interpretation.

Post-structuralism rejects the assumption in Structuralism that an essential quality of a work is the dominant relation of a hierarchy of binary opposites. Instead, Post-Structuralism aims to expose these relations and the dependency of the dominant term on its apparently subservient counterpart. Post-Structuralism aims to understand these meanings by deconstructing the assumptions and knowledge systems which produce the illusion that the text has a singular meaning. Meaning, therefore, is equally in the hands of the reader and the author.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- How does the reader respond in their understanding of how the work relates to their own personal concept of self?

Example: tbd

Deconstructional criticism:

Jacques Derrida originated this critical method which deconstructs (as the name suggests) the ideas and arguments present in a text and looks for contradictions that indicate that there can be no single interpretation of the text. This seems rather similar (or maybe even was the originating idea behind Post-structuralism).

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- Can different and conflicting interpretations of a text be used to show the instability of the language and its true meaning?
- How is the theme of the work presented in relation to the binaries in the work and how does the favoured binary dismantle the hierarchy of privilege of binaries within the work. Does the hierarchy contradict the binary that is showcased?
- What is the meaning of the text? What belief structure or ideology is it supporting?

Example: tbd

Feminist criticism

The increasing prominence of gender studies in the last hundred years or so lead to the emergence of feminist criticism. Feminist criticism is interested in exploring the ways gender dominance and submission are depicted in the text, how gender roles are reflected or contradicted by the text, and how gender roles evolve in the text.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism are:

- What gender roles are depicted in the text? What roles do men and women assume and perform and with what consequences? How are the relationships between men and women or those between members of the same sex presented in the text?
- Do these roles witness or contradict traditional gender roles? For example, are the male characters in powerful positions while the women are dominated? Are the male characters in leadership positions and active, decisive and dominant? Are the women subordinate, passive or controlled?
- Is the source of tension and jeopardy based on the gender roles within the text?
- Do the character's gender roles evolve over the course of the story?
- How is the place and time that the text was written in reflected by the way that men and women are represented in the text?
- Does the author take a male or female perspective in the text? Is the work presented in a way that reflects a predominantly male or female sensibility? Why might this have been done, what effect was intended by the author and does the work achieve this effect?
- Did the nature of the author's life and personal circumstances relate to the depiction of men and women in the work and their relative status?

Example: An early example is Virginia Woolf essay *A Room of One's Own*. More recent feminist critics include Elaine Showalter and Hélène Cixous.

Reader Response criticism

The important thing here is the reader's personal reactions to a text. Reader Response criticism assumes meaning is created by a reader's or interpretive community's personal interaction with a text. Since there can be many readers this implies there can be no single, correct, universal interpretation of the text. The meaning of the text exists in the minds of its readers.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism are:

- What are you the reader's feelings in response to reading the text?
- If you the reader personally took on the role of a character in the text, would you behave differently and why?
- What memories or experiences are invoked in you the reader?
- What values, morals or ethics do you, as the reader, believe are supported or discussed in the story?
- As a reader, are you surprised, inspired, disappointed, dis-illusioned, depressed and so on by the story. What is the spectrum of your emotional response and why?

An example: tbd

Media criticism

Here the methods used to deliver the work such as multimedia, visual, oral and other sensory presentations, digital and analogue channels is the important fact.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism are:

- How does the author use media to interact with the text?
- What, if any, deviations from the traditions of print and page design have been used within the text?
- In what ways has the author deviated from the traditional linear, deductively organised text?

Example: <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/elab/elab.html>

Archetypal criticism

Archetypal Criticism is concerned with identifying the underlying myths or biblical allusions in stories and archetypes. These reflect and represent the "collective unconsciousness", a term coined by the psychologist Carl Jung.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- What archetypal patterns or mythic elements are employed in this literary work? These might be apparent in the author's selection of any of the following: themes, settings, symbols, plots, genres, characters or imagery. What archetypal events occur in the story? (e.g., quest, initiation, descent into the underworld, ascents into heaven). What archetypal images occur? (e.g., rising or setting sun, water, earth, natural elements e.g., forest, symbolic colours). What archetypal images occur? ((e.g., water, rising sun, setting sun, symbolic colours). What archetypal characters appear in the story? (e.g., mother earth, femme fatal, hermit, wise old man, wanderer). What archetypal settings appear? (e.g., desert, garden, heath, cave, castle, mountains). How do these elements contribute to the work as a whole?
- Does the protagonist undergo any kind of transformation, such as movement from innocence to experience or the pursuit of a Hero's Quest that seems archetypal?
- Does the work reflect the hopes, fears, and expectations of a society or culture?

- Does the work deal with the depiction of universal experiences? What common human concerns are revealed in the story?
- Does the writer allude to biblical or mythological literature? For what purpose?

Example: [A symbolic approach to Kate Chopin's 'The Awakening'](#).

Post-colonial criticism

Starting from the viewpoint that Western cultures misrepresent the true nature of third-world countries. Post-colonial criticism analyses how a text's stories, myths, and stereotypical images encourages repression and domination.

Questions that might be considered in this form of criticism include:

- How is colonial oppression represented, either explicitly or allegorically within text?
- What does the text reveal about resistance to colonialism?
- Does the text view colonial oppression as a social, political, economic or religious issue, or as a combination of some or all of these?
- How does the text deal with the issues of personal and cultural identity?
- Which characters or groups are identified as isolated or outsiders. What does the text say about the treatment of these characters or groups?
- What does the text reveal about the operations of cultural difference
- How are the ways in which race, gender, religion, class, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, and customs combine to form individual identity depicted in the text. What does the text say about our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world in which we live?
- Where does the text place itself in relationship to the existing canon of colonialist work?
- Does the representation of colonialization and/or its inappropriate silence about colonized peoples reinforce or undermine colonialist ideology?
- Example: [Other Voices](#)

Some key contributions to Post-colonial criticism:

- Edward Said - *Orientalism*, 1978; *Culture and Imperialism*, 1994
- Kamau Brathwaite - *The History of the Voice*, 1979
- Gayatri Spivak - *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, 1987
- Dominick LaCapra - *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, 1991
- Homi Bhabha - *The Location of Culture*, 1999

Twelve books on literary criticism

See: (Interesting Literature, 2022).

- Bradley, A. C. (1905) *Shakespearean tragedy: lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan.
- Richards, I. A. (1929) *Practical criticism: a study of literary judgment*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Empson, W., (1966) *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, New Directions; 3rd ed. edition
- Spurgeon, C.F.E, (2014) *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*, Martino Fine Books
- Leavis, F.R. (1974) *The Great Tradition*, Penguin
- Abrahms, M.H., (1971) *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, Oxford University Press, U.S.A.
- Spivak, G.C. (1987) *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Routledge (1 Aug. 1987)
- Gilbert, S. M. and Gubar, S. (2000) *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literacy Imagination* Paperback, Yale University Press; 2nd edition
- Ricks, C., (1984) *The Force of Poetry*, Clarendon Press; First Edition (1 Oct. 1984)
- Royle, Nicholas. *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Cook E., (1998) *Against Coercion: Games Poets Play*, Stanford University Press

Three more:

- *The Critical Tradition: Classical Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 1998, edited by David H. Richter
- *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 1999, by Lois Tyson
- *Beginning Theory*, 2002, by Peter Barry

Scholarly Writing

A piece of academic literary criticism is expected to have recognised structure and to contain several specific elements. (In the case of the OU, it is more than an expectation, it use a requirement). Literary criticism should be written in the form of an essay, written in a scholarly style and should put forward an opinion, line of argument, proposition, thesis or opinion about a literary text. This opinion must be supported by evidence from the text (in the form of close reading and detailed analysis of quotes from the text) and weighed against similar or contrary opinions in the existing body of criticism that exists for that text. At the end of the essay, a concluding statement should be made indicating if the evidence presented in the essay does indeed support the initial opinion and indicate what further implications may be drawn from the arguments presented.

Literary critiques are based on a thesis - a statement or theory that is put forward as a premise to be maintained or proved. Note, the thesis must make an argument, not an observation.

Traditionally the critique has a simple structure. A thesis claim is made in the introduction. Each subsequent paragraph examines some aspect of this claim. Evidence is provided within the paragraph in the form of quotes and paraphrased statements from the text to serve as evidence of the claim.

Close Reading

This involves closely examining the text, at a detailed level, often word by word and sentence by sentence. The objective is to arrive at a reading or interpretation about the meaning of the work that is something more than just a completely literal understanding of the words on the page. Close reading includes identifying literary elements contained in the text, such as genre, plot, setting, characterisation, point of view, use of rhetoric, humour, irony, syntax, tone, diction, style, imagery, figurative language, theme(s), cultural/historical/religious references, rhyme, rhythm, patterns, or absence of patterns.

While close reading will look for the author's use of literary devices at the word or sentence level (such as alliteration, sensory description, assonance, metaphor, simile, leitmotiv etc) it must also look for aspects of the work that exist at a higher structural level (e.g., flashback, foreshadowing, choice of narrator and the reliability of the nature and so on as well as the author's apparent underlying moral, religious, political, social or economic message.

The objective of close reading is to gain an understanding or appreciation of how the author has assembled the text, what the apparent intent of the author is, and whether this intent is achieved. Does this detailed study of the text then facilitate a higher-level understanding of the work? The features of the work thus identified are then used as evidence to support the thesis of the essay. Close reading is not concerned with simply summarising the work, it requires a detailed analysis what the words achieve.

Essay writing

An essay written in a scholarly style must include the following elements:

1. A thesis or premise or proposition - the development of a perspective of a topic, rather than just a summary of facts. An interpretation of those facts to support a particular view of that topic which comes to a clearly stated conclusion
2. An academic voice - the essay must be written using a clear, consistent formal style using formal word choice and tone, objective phrasing, and concise but not repetitive sentence structure. While the writing should not be dry, it should focus on clarity and economy of expression.
3. Formal organisation and presentation of ideas. The essay must use a strong paragraph structure:
 - a. An introductory paragraph containing a thesis statement that introduces the topic of the essay

- b. Paragraphs that support the argument being proposed. Each paragraph should make an individual point in the overall argument and this point must be supported with evidence and analysis. One way of thinking about body paragraphs in scholarly writing is the MEAL plan:
- i. Main Idea: Your topic sentence stating the concrete claim the paragraph is advancing.
 - ii. Evidence: Paraphrase or direct quotations from the source material you are using to support your topic sentence's claim
 - iii. Analysis: Your explanation and evaluation of the evidence; explaining the evidence you provided and its relevance in your own words
 - iv. Lead Out: Concluding; preparing your reader to transition to the next paragraph (and the next claim)

The MEAL plan matches the general format of academic writing on many levels: that of assertion, evidence, and explanation. Many students make the mistake of writing toward a topic sentence or claim, rather than from one; keeping the MEAL plan in mind as you write will help you begin your paragraphs strongly and develop your analysis thoroughly. (Extracted from: Duke University Thompson Writing Program. (n.d.)).

1. A concluding paragraph which briefly recapitulates the essay main points and states if the thesis has been demonstrated or not.
4. Cited evidence and critical and logical analysis. The arguments in the essay must be supported by scholarly sources, which are generally peer-reviewed articles, books, and journals. As an academic writer, you should express your own personal views, but these must be supported either by specific evidence from relevant recognised scholarly resources or by evidence based on close reading of the text under analysis.
5. Support evidence must always contain a citation (and a corresponding reference list entry) indicating the source of that evidence. The citations and reference should be expressed in the specified house style (OU Harvard for the Open University).

A good scholarly essay will

- easily identify your thoughts and ideas on a subject and distinguish these from the thoughts and ideas of others.
- express and analysis the relationship between ideas rather than simply making a sequence of factual statements that the reader has to interpret themselves
- take a balanced view of the topic
- be objective
- be formal in tone and impersonal in style
- may use the passive form of verbs
- tend to employ a cautious way of explaining findings, using expressions such as 'may', 'it is possible that...', 'could'
- may use specialised vocabulary
- write in your own words, using the vocabulary and expressions relevant to your subject

- link your ideas in a logical way
- use sentences in grammatical English with accurate spelling so that your meaning is clear.
- contain a citation for each source of critical evidence or other supporting information and an accompanying reference list expressed in the appropriate house style (OU Harvard for the Open University).

A good scholarly essay will not

- summarise the text. It is assumed that the readers of the critical essay are familiar with the text being analysed so providing a summary in a critical essay adds no value.
- use personal pronouns such as I, me, you. On the other hand, it is arguable that, given that you are encouraged to think for yourself, interpret texts, and develop an argument in your essay, it makes sense to use the first person. If you do use it though, ensure that views or opinions are backed up by evidence and reference to critics.
- use verbs that are composed of multiple words, such as 'give up', 'put up with'
- express personal bias
- use contractions or shortened forms of verbs, such as won't, doesn't or it's

Conventions vary for the presentation format of a literary essay. A commonly used set of guidelines might be:

- Microsoft Word (doc or docx) or Adobe PDF.
- Normal margins. (2.54 cm top/bottom/right/left) on an A4 page
- Times New Roman, 12-point, black font
- Use double line spacing in general.
- Indent the first line of every paragraph (except the first line of each new section)
- Normal header and footer space
- Personal identifiers Place in the header or footer
- Number the pages in the header or footer
- If quotations exceed 40 words, then use a block quotation rather than an in-line quotation. The block quote should be a single indented paragraph. It does not require enclosing quote marks.
- Use single line spacing for block quotes or poetry (or if the poetry has a special layout - then following this exactly)
- In line quotations should be placed inside single quote marks. Line breaks within the quotation should be indicated by a forward slash, e.g., 'There was an Old Man with a beard / Who said, "It is just as I feared! / Two Owls and a Hen, / Four Larks and a Wren, / Have all built their nests in my beard!"'
- Italicise Book, Journal and Play titles, e.g., *Hamlet*, *The Playboy of the Western World*
- Titles of articles in journals or chapters in books are not italicised - they should be placed in single quotation marks, e.g., "Going Native": Geography, Gender, and Identity in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters" in *British Literature in Context in the Long Eighteenth Century*
- If this essay is a response to a course question, then you may be asked to restate the question at the top of the answer. If there are optional sections to the question, make it clear which options you are answering

- Use a consistent referencing style, e.g., the Cite Them Right Harvard referencing style (Pears, R. and Shields, G. 2022)
- Place the list of references, in alphabetic order after the word count
- Indicate the word count for the piece. Do not count titles, restatement of the question etc, but do include in line references and quotes. Do not include the reference list or bibliography at the end of the piece.

Evaluative summary writing

Literary Criticism often consists of an academic essay that evaluates a piece of creative writing such as a novel or poem. An academic essay that evaluates a piece of literary criticism rather than a creative work is called an evaluative summary. Evaluative summaries are not limited to literary criticism but may also be used in more general ways to consider any material that presents an opinion or an argument.

An evaluative summary is made up of two elements:

- An accurate, clear and balanced summary of the text being analysed. This is essentially a factual analysis. (From the tutor's point of view this demonstrates that the student can understand and summarise the facts, arguments and opinions that the author has presented in the text. The summary does not pass any judgement, but merely concisely documents the contents of the text.
- Your own critical analysis of the quality of the arguments being presented in the text. This is the evaluation part. (Here the tutor is looking for evidence that the student can show critical judgement and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the author's views or arguments. While the critical analysis will contain statements of your opinion about the author's text, these opinions should be backed up by reasoned arguments, and by supporting evidence from expert sources wherever possible.

In an evaluative summary you are providing both an analysis and a reasoned judgement. You are not just summarising the facts in the text being analysed, but you are also providing an expert opinion on the validity of these facts.

As an example, consider the American Fox Network TV program, *Conspiracy Theory: Did We Land on the Moon?* This claimed NASA faked the moon first landing in 1969 to win the space race.

The evaluative summary of this article might contain the following sections:

Summary: Here the content of the TV programme would be discussed, in a factual way. The summary would cover who created the programme, what the context of the programme was (it was being made some time after the moon landings), and what the audience reaction was. The summary would also concisely list the claims made by the programme and the things that programme presented as facts to support those claims. (These might include the fact that the flag placed by Apollo 11 on the moon seems to be flapping in the wind, hence it cannot be on the moon as there is no atmosphere, the fact that the astronauts would be killed by radiation in the Van Allen belts around the Earth on their journey to the moon, that NASA

have ‘lost’ the high resolution telemetry tapes from the mission suggesting a cover up and so on).

Evaluation: While the summary is ‘just the facts’, the evaluation considers whether these so-called facts are correct. Correct of course can be a subjective judgement. So, the evaluation of the moon conspiracy programme might discuss why Fox made the programme - presumably to show government was being dishonest by supporting a conspiracy - and why Fox was interested in doing that. The evaluation would also consider how plausible the conspirators’ arguments were and why the conspirators were presenting these arguments - perhaps with the purpose of undermining the establishment, by proving the government lies to the people. While this evaluation might be a subjective judgement, it can be backed up by considering whether the facts or arguments presented by the conspirators are supported by scientific evidence or expert opinion. There is much in the literature to show that the Flag would remain in whatever position it was set, so no wind is needed, that the radiation in the Van Allen belts, though dangerous, is not experienced for long enough to kill the astronauts and that NASA was simply incompetent and lost the tapes through human error. The evaluation would therefore argue that the conspirators’ arguments were weak and false and that the Fox documentary, while entertaining had no actual intellectual merit. These counter arguments provide the meat of the evaluation but most importantly they should be backed up with references to the appropriate scientific journals and historical evidence. The evaluation may certainly express the opinions of the person writing the evaluation, but these opinions should always be supported by creditable sources, if possible.

Questions to ask yourself when writing an evaluative summary of an article

- Who wrote the article? What is their expertise / authority to write on the topic? Is he or she likely to be prejudiced? What is their motivation? Who was the intended audience? How did the audience react to the article?
- When was the article written. What was the political, social, economic, moral etc environment at the time - did that have a bearing on the article?
- What arguments does the article present? What evidence is presented to support these arguments? Is the author opinionated and do they expect the reader to accept a fact or idea simply because the author says so? Are there implicit assumptions in the author’s arguments.
- What tone does the article adopt? Does the author use objective language or does he/she try to use unfair persuasion by using emotive words (eg terrible, horrible, disgusting, appalling). Are there unsupported generalisations, these statements often beginning with words "all", "every", "most" etc. but lack statistical or logical supporting evidence.
- Is the article clearly expressed? Does the author expect the reader to accept a fact or idea that is important to the argument, but that is not clearly stated.

Using the Critics

The use of critical resources is a key part of writing an essay of literary criticism.

- Use the critics as testing board for your own thoughts and opinion. It may be better to start a paragraph using your own views, rather than using a quotation from a critic. You can then use the critics within the paragraph to backup or questions the opinion you started the paragraph with.
- Don't necessarily believe the critics. They may be right, or they may be wrong. They certainly may contradict each other. The lifeblood of literary criticism is debate and disagreement. Literary criticism is very different from the scientific method. Unless you are writing a purely evaluative essay, the backbone of your essay should be your response to the text you are analysing. The critics are there to illuminate your response.
- Do not restrict yourself to a single critical source. It is best to consider the views of multiple critics and see which support your opinion or position and which do not. and think about what your own opinion is.
- It is probably best not to align yourself completely to a single critical position. There are many nuances in critical thinking, and it is very unlikely that anyone will agree completely with everything a given critic says. So, some element of picking and choosing is required.
- It is important to take each critic seriously and engage with their position rather than dismiss them out of hand. A critic's argument should only be rejected by providing a properly reasoned argument for that rejection.
- The first reference to a particular critic should use both their first name and their surname. Subsequent references use the surname only.
- Avoid redundancy. If you have discussed a critic's views about a particular topic and have credited it to them, there is no need to directly quote the work in which the critic expressed those views. Just include a page number in the reference to the critic.
- Be rigorously consistent in your referencing style. For example: According to John Smith, *Macbeth* is 'a play about motivations, not about actions' (Smith, 2020, p. 123).
- Critical sources are best used to either (a) support or illustrate a part of your own argument (b) disagree with an argument (supporting evidence and reasons should be provided) or (c) extend or develop your arguments.
- A critical source can often profitably be applied outside its original context, e.g., applying to a different text or a different form. For example, something a critic says about Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* may have relevance to James R Martin's *Game of Thrones*.

Useful resources for scholarly writing:

Literary Criticism 101, A Useful Fiction, [Online] Available at <https://onehundredpages.wordpress.com/literary-criticism-101/>

Open University, (2022a) 'Developing academic English' in the Open University Help Centre, Core Skills: Study Skills, Available at: <https://help.open.ac.uk/develop-your-writing> (Accessed: 23 Jul 2022).

Open University, (2022b) 'Critical Thinking and writing (Advanced)', The Student Hub, Open University, [Online] Available at: <https://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/content/critical-thinking-and-writing-advanced-12-jul-2022>

Open University, (2022c) 'Types of Assignment', Open University Help Centre, Assignments: Types of assignment, [Online] Available at <https://help.open.ac.uk/essays>

Open University, (2022d) 'Types of Assignment', Open University Help Centre, Assignments: Writing in your own words, [Online] Available at <https://help.open.ac.uk/writing-in-your-own-words>

Useful resources for close reading

There are some very short examples at:

Open University, (2022e) 'Don't describe—analyse', Undergraduate arts and humanities: Skills: Skills toolkits: English Literature Toolkit. Available at <https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=1859527§ion=2.2>

and of course, there are a lot of close reading examples in the Open University A334 and A335 module materials and tutorial material.

For poetry,

Muldoon, P. (2009) *The end of the poem : oxford lectures on poetry*. London: Faber.

Includes much close reading of a number of modern poets.

References

Pears, R. and Shields, G. (2022) *Cite them right : the essential referencing guide*. 12th edition. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Interesting Literature (2022) "12 of the Best Books of Literary Criticism Everyone Should Read", Interesting Literature Web Site [Online] <https://interestingliterature.com/2020/04/books-literary-criticism-theory-all-time/>

Lumen Learning (no date) English Literature I: Literary Criticism, OER Services, Lumen Learning, [Online] Available at: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-britlit1/chapter/literary-criticism/> (Accessed: 18 May 2022).

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Purdue University (2022), "Literary Theory and Schools of Criticism", Purdue Online Writing Lab, [Online] Available at:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_theory_and_schools_of_criticism/index.html) (Accessed: 8 Aug 2022)

Literary Criticism: Questions for a Variety of Approaches

[Online] Available at:

http://bcpshefordhs.ss3.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_3705599/File/Academics/English/Literary_Criticism_Generic_questions.pdf