



How to structure a literary analysis essay

Writing a literary analysis can be overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be if you have some guidance to assist you with your essay.

Read your text: Before you start writing your literary analysis, you must first read the text. You will need to read the text multiple times before jotting down any ideas that you may want to write about. This ensures that you become familiar with the work and understand it to your best ability.

Brainstorm: Write down any ideas that you have about the text. Ask yourself what you are interested in writing about the text. Perhaps there may be a character you can relate to or the setting that intrigues you. Ask yourself what you can claim about the text. Do you want to prove that a certain character is an antagonist above all other characters? Are you interested in comparing or contrasting one character in the text to a different character from another text? What elements/devices are most used in the text? Remember, the essay must be about a claim you can prove. Use this time to write and develop your ideas.

Know your literary terms: A literary analysis can be a bit difficult to dissect if you are unaware of what key terms to know in order to understand what you are looking for in the text. Be sure you take notes in class and annotate the text you are reading. Taking notes will assist you later on when it is time to brainstorm ideas for your essay. Our "Elements of a Literary Analysis" handout is also a great guide to get you started on knowing your literary terms.

Writing an introduction paragraph: Explain in a few sentences what your essay is about. Start off with a general idea about your topic. Provide some background information about the author or the text, itself. With each sentence, go from a broad topic about your essay to specific points you want to write about within the analysis essay. Reminder that each sentence builds on the previous one and should be more specific as you get to your thesis.

Example of introduction: "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a popular literary piece, especially in women's gender studies. It focuses on several inequalities in the relation between John and his wife. It was published for the first time in 1892 in a New England magazine and is considered to be one of the earliest and essential feminist literary pieces in America. The story illustrates the physical as well as the mental deterioration of women during the nineteenth century due to the medically prescribed treatment "The Rest Cure," which consists of bed rest and isolation from their relatives, friends, and work as well as hobbies that were deemed too exciting. Gilman created a very effective fictional narrative based on her personal experience with depression, and this had a strong impact on other women.

Writing a thesis statement: The thesis should tell your reader exactly what your essay will be about. It should contain your specific topic, your main point about that topic, and the points of discussion you will include in your paper. Your thesis should be clear, and easy to find. Most often, it is the last sentence of the introduction.

Example Thesis: Gilman's shorts story, "The Yellow Wallpaper" was written to condemn the sexual politics, which made the medical treatment "The Rest Cure" prescribed possible.

Topic sentences and writing body paragraphs – Each paragraph should have a



topic sentence that explains what the paragraph is about. Each topic sentence derives from the thesis statement. Support each topic sentence with three pieces of evidence. Use in-text citations for each piece of evidence you use that is not your idea.

Example Topic sentence: In Gilman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper," John acts as the mirror through which women are viewed negatively in the society, a society in which women are not perceived to be full citizens.

Example of a piece of evidence: John dismisses his wife's concerns about her room and refuses to renovate it to accommodate her. Furthermore, John treats his wife as a child by calling her "a blessed little goose" (Gilman 649). The dismissal of her concerns and seemingly innocent nickname demonstrates that John does not see his wife as an equal, but rather, a child, which men viewed women as in the nineteenth century.

Note: The writer leads into the piece of evidence before presenting it to the reader. The piece of evidence is paraphrased, so the writer puts the in-text citation, which tells the reader this is not their idea. A transition word is used to introduce or the writer's piece of evidence or add to it.

Writing the conclusion – Restate your thesis in this paragraph and sum up the evidence used in your paper. **DO NOT** introduce any new ideas at this point. End with the significance of the work or a "so what"

Example Conclusion: Overall, 'the Yellow Wallpaper' is a sad tale of a woman who has struggled to find her identity beyond the domestic domains of married life. Operating from the tone of the woman, Gilman is able to highlight the different struggles she had to face in order to express herself and identity to her husband. Despite her attempt to reach out to her husband John, the act remains to be futile as her actions only reflect that of a psychological and mental condition that needs to be treated. By bringing these issues forward, the story is able to show the disparity of treatment surrounding women during the period as well as the oppressive social forces that continue to impede the development of women through the use of misdiagnosis and disdain.

Works Cited: A Works Cited page is a formatted list of all sources you cited within your paper. Anytime you quote, paraphrase, summarize, or include information that you've read from a source, you must include that source in your references list, correctly formatted in MLA style.

Example:

Banks, Marina. 'Literary Analysis the Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman' Humanities 360. 29 May 2008. Web. Accessed 30 August 2014.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. 'The Yellow Wallpaper' Gutenberg.org.1892. Web. Accessed 30 August 2014.
Sustana, Catherine. 'Analysis of 'The Yellow Paper' by Charlotte Perkins Gilman' About Short Stories. N.d. Web. Accessed 30 August 2014.

For more information on how to cite other sources, visit

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_works_cited_page_basic_format.html



Below is an outline of a literary analysis essay. Use this as a guide to help format your essay.

- I. Introduction**
 - a. Background information
 - b. Thesis at the end

- II. First body paragraph**
 - a. Topic sentence one
 - i. First piece of evidence with explanation
 - ii. Second piece of evidence with explanation
 - iii. Third piece of evidence with explanation

- III. Second body paragraph**
 - a. Topic sentence
 - i. First piece of evidence with explanation
 - ii. Second piece of evidence with explanation
 - iii. Third piece of evidence with explanation

- IV. Third body paragraph**
 - a. Topic sentence
 - i. First piece of evidence with explanation
 - ii. Second piece of evidence with explanation
 - iii. Third piece of evidence with explanation

- V. Conclusion**
 - a. Significance of the work/so what?