

Checklist for Revising a Literary Analysis

- Does the title of the essay consist of more than the title of the work? Your title should give the reader an idea of your topic.
- Does the introductory paragraph avoid openings such as "In this story. . ."? Name the author and the title so that the reader knows exactly what work you are discussing. Develop your thesis a bit so the readers know where they will be going.
- Is the organization effective? The essay should not dwindle or become anticlimactic; rather, it should build up.
- Do quotations provide evidence and let the reader hear the author's voice?
- Is the essay chiefly devoted to analysis, not summary? Do not summarize the plot in great detail. A couple of sentences may be helpful if your readers are not familiar with the work, but a summary is not an essay.
- Have you used present tense of verbs to describe both the author's work and the action in the work (for example, Chopin shows or Mrs. Mallard dies)?
- If you have used the first-person "I" (for instance, I find the ending plausible), have you avoided using it so often that you sound egotistical? [It is best to avoid first person altogether.]
- Is your evaluation of the work evident? It may be understood, or it may be explicit. In either case, give the reasons for judging the work to be effective or not, worth reading or not. Remember that it is not enough to express your likes and dislikes; readers will be interested in an evaluation only if you support it with evidence.
- Did you document your sources?

Questions for Analyzing Fiction

- What happens in the story? Give a SHORT summary of the plot (the gist of the happenings). Think about what your summary leaves out.
- Is the story told in chronological order, or are there flashbacks or flashforwards? On rereading, what foreshadowing (hints of what is to come) do you detect?
- What conflicts does the work include?
- How does the writer reveal character--for instance, by explicit comment or by letting us see the character in action? With which character(s) do you sympathize? Are the characters plausible? What motivates them? What do minor characters contribute to the work?
- Who tells the story? Is the narrator a character, or does the narrator stand entirely outside the characters' world?
- What is the setting, the time and place of the action? What does the setting contribute to the work?
- Do certain characters or settings seem to you to stand for something in addition to themselves?
- What is the theme--that is, what does the work add up to? Does the theme reinforce values that you hold, or does it challenge them?
- Is the title informative? Did the meaning change for you after you read the work?

IMAGERY: word pictures or visual details involving the senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste)

- What images does the writer use?
- What senses do they draw on?
- What patterns are evident in the images (for instance, religious or commercial images)?
- What is the significance of the imagery?

SYMBOLS: concrete things standing for larger and more abstract ideas (for instance, the American flag may symbolize freedom, a tweeting bird may symbolize happiness, or a dead flower may symbolize mortality)

- What symbols does the author use?
- What do they seem to signify?
- How does the symbolism relate to the other elements of the work, such as character or theme?

SETTING: the place where the action happens

- What does the locale contribute to the story?
- Are scene shifts significant?

FORM: the shape or structure of the work

- What is the form? (For example, a story might divide in the middle, moving from happiness to sorrow.)
- What parts of the work does the form emphasize, and why?

THEME: the main idea, the gist of what the work adds up to

- How might the theme be stated?
- How do the parts of the work develop the theme?

APPEAL: the degree to which the story pleases you

- What do you especially like or dislike about the work? Why?
- Do you think your responses are unique or common to most readers? Why?

Guidelines for Using Quotations in Literary Analysis

- Use quotations to support your assertions, not to pad the paper. Quote at length only when necessary to your argument.
- When you use a quotation, specify how it relates to your idea. Introduce the quotation. Sometimes comment after the quotation.
- Reproduce spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and all other features exactly as they appear in the source.
- Document your sources.