

FINAL Literary Analysis Paper

What is a literary analysis?

- In a literary analysis, you write a formal paper in which you **make an argument and support your argument** with examples from and analysis of a literary text.

What a literary analysis **IS NOT**!

- A paper exploring the relevance of the story to your own life. While your own experience will of course shape your writing style as well as the story you pick, you should not focus on personal life experiences or use them as arguments for your topic.
- A summary of the story.

Tips for Writing a Literary Analysis

1. Write in the **present tense**.

- **EXAMPLE:** In Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," the townspeople **visit** Emily Grierson's house because it **smells** bad.
- **NOT:** In Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," the townspeople **visited** Emily Grierson's house because it **smelled** bad.

2. Normally, keep yourself out of your analysis; in other words, use the third person (no **I** or **you**).

- **THIRD PERSON:** The narrator in "Sonny's Blues" is a dynamic character **who** changes his attitude toward and relationship with Sonny as the story progresses.
- **THIRD PERSON:** At the end of "Everyday Use," Mama realizes that Maggie is like her but has not received enough attention to build self-esteem.

3. Avoid summarizing the plot (i.e., retelling the story literally—a very brief plot summary should be included in the introduction as background for the reader).

Instead **analyze** (form a thesis about and explain) the story in literary terms.

- **PLOT SUMMARY:** In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," the mad narrator explains in detail how he kills the old man, who screams as he dies. After being alerted by a neighbor, the police arrive, and the madman gives them a tour through the house, finally halting in the old man's bedroom, where he has buried the man beneath the floor planks under the bed. As he is talking, the narrator hears what he thinks is the old man's heart beating loudly, and he is driven to confess the murder.
- **ANALYSIS:** Though the narrator claims he is not mad, the reader realizes that the narrator in "The Telltale Heart" is unreliable and lies about his sanity. For example, the mad narrator says he can hear "all things in the heaven and in the earth." Sane people cannot. He also lies to the police when he tells them that the shriek they hear occurs in his dream. Though sane people do lie, most do not meticulously plan murders, lie to the police, and then confess without prompting. Finally, the madman is so plagued with guilt that he hears his own conscience in the form of the old man's heart beating loudly. Dead hearts do not beat, nor do sane people confuse their consciences with the sounds of external objects.

4. Include a clear thesis statement which addresses something meaningful about the literature, often about the theme.

5. Use literary terms to discuss your points (i.e., character, theme, setting, point of view, alliteration, symbols, imagery, figurative language, protagonist, conflict, and so forth).

- **NONLITERARY TERMS:** To show that women are important, Adrienne Rich writes about Aunt Jennifer and the tigers that she creates in her needlework.
- **LITERARY TERMS:** The poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" contains vivid **images** and **symbols** which reveal a **feminist perspective**.

6. Support your points with textual evidence, but write the majority of your paper in your own words with your own ideas.