**Literary Analysis Paper**

1. It deals with a literary work & certain concepts that are very specifically associated with literature
2. It analyzes the work and possibly secondary (researched) sources
3. It makes an argument

**Important Literary Concepts**

* Plot
* Setting
* Narration/POV
* Characterization
* Symbol
* Metaphor
* Genre
* Irony/Ambiguity
* Historical context
* Social, political, economic contexts
* Ideology
* Multiple voices
* Various critical orientations
* Literary theory

**Topics for an Analysis**

* How the various components of an individual work relate to each other
* How two separate literary works deal with similar concepts or forms
* How concepts and forms in literary works relate to larger aesthetic, political, social, economic, or religious contexts

**Secondary Sources**

* Book or article that discusses the text you are discussing
* Book or article that discusses a theory related to the argument you are making
* Book or article that discusses the social and historical context of the text you are discussing

**Make it an Argument**

* Focus on a specific attribute of the text
* Make a specific, arguable point (thesis) about these attributes
* Defend this point with reasons and evidence drawn from the text

**Thesis Statements**

* **Example:** The use of “whiteness” in *Moby Dick* illustrates the uncertainty about the meaning of life that Ishmael expresses throughout the novel.
  + **Prove it:** 1. Textual use of whiteness; 2. Textual support for Ishmael’s uncertainty about the meaning of life; 3. Why whiteness illustrates Ishmael’s belief
* **Example:** Hamlet experiences internal conflict because he is in love with his mother.
  + **Prove it:** 1. How Hamlet is in love with his mother; 2. Why he’s in love with her; 3. What implications there are for reading the play in this manner
* **Support using**: direct quotations, summaries of scenes, paraphrases from primary text; other critics’ opinions, historical and social context from secondary texts

**Integrating Secondary Sources**

* Be sure to show how they relate to your thesis
* Don’t overuse any one or all secondary sources
* This is your paper – the secondary sources just help you out
* Never, never plagiarize
* For example, say you are arguing that **Huck Finn is a Christ figure**; that's your basic thesis. You give evidence from the novel that allows this reading, and then, at the right place, you might say the following, a paraphrase:
  + According to Susan Thomas, Huck sacrifices himself because he wants to set Jim free (129).

If the scholar states an important idea in a memorable way, use a direct quote.

* + "Huck's altruism and feelings of compassion for Jim force him to surrender to the danger" (Thomas 129).

Either way, you will then link that idea to your thesis.

**What kinds of topics are good ones?**

The best topics are ones that originate out of your own reading of a work of literature, but here are some common approaches to consider:

* A discussion of a work's characters: are they realistic, symbolic, historically-based?
* A comparison/contrast of the choices different authors or characters make in a work
* A reading of a work based on an outside philosophical perspective (Ex. how would a Freudian read Hamlet?)
* A study of the sources or historical events that occasioned a particular work (Ex. comparing G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion with the original Greek myth of Pygmalion)
* An analysis of a specific image occurring in several works (Ex. the use of moon imagery in certain plays, poems, novels)
* A "deconstruction" of a particular work (Ex. unfolding an underlying racist worldview in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness)
* A reading from a political perspective (Ex. how would a Marxist read William Blake's "London"?)
* A study of the social, political, or economic context in which a work was written — how does the context influence the work?

Tips for writing taken from the Online Writing Lab of Purdue University, at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/)