

## Literary Analysis

**Purpose:** to interpret, evaluate, and reflect on an aspect(s) of a literary work. Critical analysis can add new dimension to your understanding of the real world and the motivations of the people you know, thereby applying literature to your own life.

**Organization:** Use the standard essay form—introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion.

**Introduction** should name the work and author. Begin with some general statement about your topic. Narrow the discussion to your thesis sentence, specifically stating which literary element you will be discussing, your own personal slant on this element, and the implied approach for the development of your discussion. It is this personal slant which makes the thesis “arguable”—that is, one which you must prove. For example, a thesis sentence for a paper about *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee might be:

*Although Maycomb seems locked in a cycle of stereotypical Southern prejudice, Miss Maudie, Atticus Finch, and Mr. Underwood show hope that this prejudice is finally beginning to erode.*

In this example the **literary element** is an evaluation of the three characters’ actions. The **personal slant** is that prejudice is eroding in Maycomb. We assume from reading this thesis that the three body paragraphs will be developed around the actions of each character (**implied approach**).

**Body paragraphs** should take the form of claim – evidence – warrant pattern. Your topic sentence will probably be your claim. Miss Maudie showed in her discussions with Jem and Scout an open-mindedness that was rare among the women of Maycomb. This would need to be followed with evidence—that is statements by Miss Maudie (quotations), which support your claim. In some cases, evidence may consist of paraphrased incidents rather than quotations. After introducing your evidence the most important and most overlooked section is the **warrant**—you tell how these quotations show the open-mindedness of Miss Maudie. Do not let the quotations “speak for themselves.” It is this portion of your writing that tells how clearly you are making connections between the work and your ideas. Each body paragraph should continue with this form.

**Conclusion:** Try to think of the conclusion as a look forward or bridge to the real world: forecast the future (such as you would do with the Mockingbird theme), call for action, discuss implications, or point out the significance of the ideas as they relate to life today.

Strategies:

1. Follow formal writing style.
2. Use present tense to discuss the work, but use past tense to discuss the background.

3. Be careful to analyze not summarize.
4. Be positive in your approach and “stick to your guns.” Avoid weasel words such as: *I think, I believe, In my opinion.*
5. Choose evidence carefully to strengthen your essay. Don’t forget the warrant for that evidence.