Writing about Literature

I. General Purpose

Writing about literature (fiction, non-fiction, drama, prose, poetry) explores, investigates, interprets, applies, and expands upon the literature, often examining connections between literature and other aspects of culture. People write about literature to understand their own responses to it; to convince others of a position; to explain or introduce new concepts; to compare authors or eras; or to connect to a culture or field. Audiences include readers, writers, peers, professors, newspapers, and the general public.

II. Types of Writing

- **Literature review**: examination of previous scholarship on a topic (a work, a genre, an author, etc.) which serves to determine what has already been said/done on the topic and usually precedes a new piece of scholarship on the same topic;
- **Poetry explication**: "unfolding" or in-depth analysis of the meaning of a poem (examines diction, meter, rhyme scheme, poesy, etc.);
- **Critical analysis**: discussion of a topic through a lens of critical theory (e.g., feminist theory, new historicism, Marxism, critical race theory, etc.);
- **Close reading**: similar to an explication, but dealing with a prose passage (looks at diction, word order, tone, etc.);
- **Conference paper**: scholarly paper (generally 8-10 pages) intended to be presented orally at a conference of one's peers/colleagues;
- **Seminar paper**: scholarly paper (between 10-25 pages) intended for one's professor, often the culmination of a semester’s work;
- **Journal article**: scholarly writing intended for publication in a professional or academic journal which may engage, expand, or refute a previous argument by another scholar

III. Types of Evidence

- Primary sources (pieces of literature, letters by or to the author)
- Secondary sources (reviews, critical scholarship, biographies, historical accounts, books or articles about the subject)
- Facts, statistics, quotations, research from sources, explanations, examples, stories, references to text

IV. Writing Conventions

- Use of first person acceptable when making an argument ("I believe…", "I intend to argue…")
• Conversational or informal language discouraged for the sake of credibility and professionalism
• Conference papers should refrain from quoting long passages or referring to previous pages as they are intended to be presented aloud
• Literature should always be discussed in present tense
• Critical thought employed (explore one’s response and opposition; evaluate, test; adjust; draw conclusions)
• Active voice is preferred
• Correctness and documentation of sources emphasized
• Multiple interpretations can be considered correct, although interpretations not supported by textual evidence would not be correct.

V. Terms/ Acronyms/ Concepts
• Formalism/ New Criticism
• New Historicism
• Structuralism
• Deconstruction
• Reader-Response Criticism
• Marxist Criticism
• Cultural Criticism
• Psychoanalytic interpretation
• Feminist/Gender/Queer Criticism
• Ecocriticism
• Postcolonial Criticism
• Genre
• Pathetic fallacy
• Intentional fallacy
• Tone
• Style
• Voice
• Poesy
• Rhythm
• Rhyme
• Meter
• Diction
• Plot
• Climax
• Dénouement
• Gesturing

VI. Citation Style
• MLA (class assignments, seminars and/or final papers)
• CMS (Chicago Manual of Style) (some journal articles, conference papers)
• APA (some journal articles, conference papers)

Sources:

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