

## 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)

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#### Sources:

Barnet, Sylvan and William E. Cain. *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature*. 11<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2009. Print.

Birkets, Sven P. *Literature: The Evolving Canon*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1993. Print.  
Roberts, Edgar V. *Writing about Literature*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice  
Hall, 2009. Print.