

Notes on Writing about Literature: A Brief Guide to Better Writing
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General Criteria for Evaluating Writing about Literature

The following questions may help you edit your paper and prepare a better assignment:

- Is the title of my paper a phrase and does it relate to the thesis of the paper? Does my title include the title of the work under discussion? Do I capitalize all the important words in my title?
- Does my introduction begin directly by placing the literary work within the context of the specific issues that my paper will raise and do I define those issues? Is it clear from my introduction where my paper is headed?
- Does my introduction end with a focused thesis statement that is both restrictive and precise?
- Do my paragraphs have clear topic sentences or transitional generalizations that relate directly to the thesis? Do I follow a discernable pattern of development or organization? Is the organization or order of my paragraphs clear? Do I use any recognizable technique of development?
- Does my paper contain logical paragraphing, a logical sequence of paragraphs, and are the paragraphs well developed and of adequate length? Do the sentences within my paragraphs also follow a logical sequence?
- Do I have transitions between paragraphs and ideas?
- Do I analyze and argue or do I merely summarize the plot or retell the action?
- Do I incorporate my evidence successfully into my discussion, explain it and integrate it properly, or do I merely dump lengthy quotations into my paper under the assumption that they will be self-explanatory?
- Do I pile on quotations on top of quotations instead of writing my own judicious discussion and analysis?

- Are my in-text quotations too long? Should they be blocked?
- Do I quote precisely from the text? Do I use quotations that make sense in the context of my own sentences and are my quotations introduced properly or coherently attached to my own sentences?
- Do I quote properly material already within quotation marks in the text?
- Do I punctuate my in-text quotations properly, with *and* without parenthetical documentation? Do I punctuate my blocked quotations properly in light of parenthetical documentation?
- Do I consistently use the present tense in discussing the text?
- Does my discussion have a proper voice or point of view? Is the language of my paper admissible, the diction appropriate?
- Does my paper analyze the text objectively or do I inject all sorts of personal prejudices and beliefs into my paper and moralize, preach, or attack the author or the characters?
- If the assignment called for writing a comparison and contrast paper have I mistakenly discussed the two works separately and then tried to do some comparing and contrasting in the conclusion only? Or does my paper maintain a proper dialogue or interplay between the two texts that I am analyzing?
- Have I eliminated all grammatical or sentence sense errors that may cloud or entirely impede the reader's comprehension?
- Does my paper still contain verb tense errors, subject-verb agreement errors, fragments, run-ons, pronoun reference problems, spelling errors, and errors in the use of the apostrophe?
- Finally, does my discussion end with a logical conclusion that does not merely repeat the thesis or the introduction? Have I been careful not to introduce any new ideas or points not covered by the paper? Do I leave my reader with something to think about?