



Writing a Literary Analysis

WHAT IS A LITERARY ANALYSIS ESSAY?

Literary is concerning literature, and analysis is carefully studying and considering something by breaking it down into parts to better understand it. A literary analysis, then, is a paper in which the writer closely examines a piece of literature to come to a unique and debatable interpretation of the author/poet's techniques or the message of the piece.

WHEN WRITING...

When writing a literary analysis, you will look for clues, specific examples from the text, to support your interpretation. When you find these examples, you will need to explain how they support your thesis so your readers are not left to make the connection themselves.

For example, I might argue that Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" is an extended metaphor reflecting the conflicting love the man felt for his father, and the tone of the poem was that of longing to relive a time that has long since passed.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR REVISION

- You might be asked to use secondary sources when writing your paper. These are articles and books written and published about the same primary source by academics before you.
- Secondary sources might not agree with your analysis. That is OK. If they have differing opinions, you can provide evidence that supports yours while also including theirs as another option for consideration.
- You can think of a literary analysis as stepping into a conversation that has been ongoing for decades. You are now part of the conversation, and you are adding your thoughts to it. You don't need to rely on another scholar's ideas because yours are just as valid.
- Be sure that you can support your interpretation with evidence from the primary source (text you are analyzing) & analysis of that evidence (how it supports your thesis), and you have done your job as a writer.
- Your thesis needs to be analytical and argumentative. It should not be evaluative. You are not making a judgement on how well the author used metaphors, but what the metaphors represented, or what their effect was on readers/the overall meaning of the story/poem/play.
- Literary analysis essays use MLA formatting and citation guidelines.