The Literary Writing Handbook

Compiled by Michelle Iskra, M.A.
Cedar Park High School
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(materials are compiled from the following sources: Gretchen Polnac, Sarah Marhevsky, Gayle Puett, Patty Craig, Michelle Iskra, Erik Simpson, Michael Barsanti, Harvard University, The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and The University of Victoria, Canada)

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General Rubric for AP Essays
(but these recommendations generally describe good analytical writing and, as such, may be used for any essay)

AP Literature essays are scored on a scale of 9-0, with 9 being the highest possible score. Strong use of language can raise the score by a whole point; poor use of language, similarly, can lower the score. Particularly poor use of language results in a score of no higher than a three. As AP guidelines suggest, scores reflect the essay as a whole, and writers are rewarded for what they do well, not punished for each individual mistake.

9-8
These essays share common characteristics: the content thoroughly satisfies the audience by providing a plethora of appropriate textual support and commentary – a discussion of how the appropriate textual support provides meaning. The writer is apt in his/her analysis. The upper half papers reveal a stylistic command of language. Mechanically, they are nearly flawless. The sentence structure is fluid and varied. The diction is mature and sophisticated. The content of these papers suggests that the writer included every idea necessary to convince the reader of his/her position, and his/her style is ideally both pleasing and rhythmic.

7-6
These essays contain all the criteria of the 9-8 papers, but have less finesse than them. They may suffer a lapse in analysis or have insufficient commentary – those cogent comments that connect proof to meaning and support of the thesis. There may be a few lapses in diction or syntax, but usually the paper conveys the writer’s ideas less clearly. These are good essays, not great ones.

5
These essays are limited in their analysis. Content may be inconsistently or inadequately developed. A few lapses in diction or syntax may be present, but for the most part, the prose of 5 papers conveys ideas clearly. They are, however, unexceptional, offering little or no insight into the topic under discussion.

4
These essays respond inadequately to the question’s task. They may misinterpret the text under discussion or fail to convey the writer’s ideas effectively and convincingly. They may suggest inconsistent control over such elements as organization, diction, and syntax.

3
These essays are described by criteria for the score of 4 but are overly brief and/or unperceptive in their attempts to discuss the literature. They reveal inconsistent control of the elements of writing. They simply reiterate ideas already discussed.

2
These essays demonstrate little or no success in this assignment. They may simply summarize the text with no evidence of analysis. These papers reveal consistent weaknesses in the basic elements of composition.

1
These papers are simplistic in all ways and may merely touch on the topic at hand.
Essay Commendations and Corrections Guide

The codes and accompanying remarks listed below will replace most comments usually made by the scorer (instructor or peer reviewer). Use the guide in two ways: first, to note corrections necessary to improve writing in general and this paper in particular; second, to note the successes you have had in the writing of this paper. It behooves you to continue to practice these praiseworthy stylistic patterns. The guide is best used with a concise handbook such as Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style, 4th ed.*

Introduction

1A
The introduction needs to develop the concept you wish to discuss more completely. Give more emphasis to the background of your topic and to why it is important.

1B
The introduction is strong and illuminating overall; a good start, reflecting organization and interest.

2A
Thesis is weak; this critical statement lacks sequenced and related ideas needed to build a clear argument. Name characters and concepts you will discuss in the essay; the statement should be a map of the paper. See the “Five Ways of Looking at a Thesis” handout for further help.

2B
Thesis works well, making an intelligent, interesting argument while accurately mapping the piece.

Body Paragraphs

3A
Assert a clear idea at the beginning of the paragraph as part of the topic sentence (consider this a body thesis). Make it a sharp and precise statement of the issue you will prove through evidence and commentary. Assert neither a plot element nor a fact as a topic sentence.

3B
Strong topic sentence (body thesis) controls paragraph contents and purpose.

4A
More examples will help prove this point. There is too little support to convince the reader of the validity of your argument.

4B
Examples effectively support your assertion; nice choices.

5A
Explain how this example illustrates your point; fully discuss your analysis and thinking.

5B
Examples are well analyzed and explained.

6A
Close paragraph with an idea that concludes what your topic sentence and examples have proven; do not simply mimic the assertion, nor end with your last point. *Draw a conclusion for the paragraph* that is a logical extension of the point of the body.

6B
Effective conclusion to the paragraph.

Conclusion

7A
Concluding paragraph does not draw a conclusion/does not conclude the piece. Draw a “big picture” idea at the essay’s close that grows out of the assertions you have given. Leave the reader with a better opinion of the logic and correctness of your essay, answering the question, “Why should you care that I wrote? Well, this is why…”

7B
Effective closure, actually drawing a conclusion that stems from the collective assertions and proof present in your body paragraphs. You anticipated the “Why should I care?” question and answered it here.

8A
Create a thematic statement that connects to your reader’s likely world experience. Usually the theme makes an observation about the human condition.

8B
Strong thematic observation/world connection.
Spelling/Grammar/Syntax/Reference
9
Spelling error; use a dictionary, peer editor, or spell check

10A
Ineffective and/or weak word choice (diction)
10B
Effective diction

11A
Revise for sense and logic – idea lost in current phrasing and syntax
11B
Effective sentence structure

12A
Refer to author and title at start of essay (not necessarily in the initial sentence)
12B
References to title and author nicely made and subordinated to principal ideas

13A
Little sense of voice or inappropriate voice (too casual, for example)
13B
Scholarly, sophisticated, confident voice

14A
Grammar error. Learn the rule (consult a text such as Strunk & White’s *Elements of Style*)
14B
Correct, even sophisticated grammatical choices

15A
Correct the form and placement of heading
15B
Effective use of MLA heading (left side of first page – no cover sheet)

16A
Sentence fragment; learn to recognize the basic writing error. Have a peer editor read paper before submitting. Costly.
16B
Nice use of the “effective fragment.”

17A
Use present tense in literary analysis and discussion
17B
Effective tense consistently used to show the “live” nature of literature

18A
Indefinite reference; this, that, these are used incorrectly when they carry the weight of a large idea (“This shows…” “That reveals…”). Restate the idea; clarify connections between indefinite pronouns and their antecedents
18B
Clear references that effectively clarify ideas

19
Avoid absolute words: all, every, each, any, anyone. These words suggest naïve thinking and weak logic

20A
Provide a transition between ideas both within a paragraph and when moving to another paragraph
20B
Effective use of transitions which help the organic whole

21A
Ineffective use of quotations. Quotations should be nicely embedded into your own prose
21B
Effective use of quotations, embedded nicely into your own syntax

22Effective style throughout; a great read!
Essay Commendations and Corrections Guide Response Sheet

Student Name/Period/Essay Title/Date:

Circle all the numbers you were assigned from the C/C guide in response to the attached essay:

1A  1B  2A  2B  3A  3B  4A  4B  5A  5B  6A  6B  7A  7B
8A  8B  9  10A  10B  11A  11B  12A  12B  13A  13B  14A  14B
15A 15B 16A 16B 17A 17B 18A 18B 19 20A 20B 21A 21B 22

Self-reflection on necessary changes made to the first draft and specific resources consulted in revision:

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Sample Literary Essay

The essay below was written by Steve Lyne for English 122 at the University of Victoria. It gives some idea of ways of organizing, developing paragraphs, and providing support for arguments.

Hedda Gabler's Last Dance

One of the social issues dealt with in Ibsen's problem plays is the oppression of women by conventions limiting them to a domestic life. In *Hedda Gabler* the heroine struggles to satisfy her ambitious and independent intellect within the narrow role society allows her. Unable to be creative in the way she desires, Hedda's passions become destructive both to others and herself.

Raised by a general (Ibsen 1444), Hedda has the character of a leader and is wholly unsuited to the role of "suburban housewife" (1461). Since she is unable to have the authority she craves, she exercises power by manipulating her husband George. She tells Thea, "I want the power to shape a man's destiny" (1483). Hedda's unsuitability for her domestic role is also shown by her impatience and evasiveness at any reference to her pregnancy. She confides to Judge Brack, "I've no leanings in that direction" (1471). Hedda desires intellectual creativity, not just the procreative power that binds her to a limited social function. But because her only means of exercising power is through a "creduulous" husband (1490), Hedda envies Thea's rich intellectual partnership with Eilert Loevborg (1484), which produces as their creative "child" a bold treatise on the future of society (1473-74, 1494). Hedda's rivalry with Thea for power over Eilert is a conflict between Hedda's dominating intellect (symbolized by her pistols) and the traditionally feminine power of beauty and love (symbolized by Thea's long hair).

Because Hedda lacks Thea's courage to leave her husband and risk ostracism, she tries to satisfy her intellect within society's constraints. First she seeks power through wealth and social status, marrying George on the condition she can "keep open house" and have "a liveried footman" (1464). But George's small means leave her frustrated by "wretched poverty" (1471), while her social aspirations oppress her with the fear of scandal. Secondly, Hedda achieves a balance of security and independence by marrying a dull academic, who is easily dominated and occupies himself "rooting around in libraries" (1466). But in doing so she shuts herself within a passionless marriage as tedious as a long train ride with a dull companion (1467-68). Finally, Hedda alleviates her boredom by turning to Judge Brack as a confidant: someone with whom she can flirt and speak openly as an equal. But Brack is not "a loyal friend" (1461); rather, just as Thea's husband "finds [her] useful" to take care of him (1458), Brack exploits Hedda's isolation and powerlessness for his own pleasure.

Hedda's oppressed desires become destructive, first to Eilert and Thea, and then to herself. In addition to envying Thea for her creative union with Eilert, Hedda hates her for taming a man she idealizes as a rebel for his past licentiousness, defying social mores. After taunting the reformed Eilert into a night of debauchery, Hedda imagines him returning as a Dionysian hero:

I can see him. With a crown of vine-leaves in his hair. Burning and unashamed! . . . Then he'll be himself again! He'll be a free man for the rest of his days. (1483)

However, Eilert's night of carousing ends sordidly in a brawl that ruins his reputation once again. Hedda then modifies her first ideal and urges him to defy life itself by suicide (1495). Her destructiveness to both Eilert's and Thea's creative potential is symbolized by her destruction of their manuscript: "I'm burning your child, Thea! You with your beautiful wavy hair! The child Eilert Loevborg gave you" (1496).

But Hedda's actions ultimately destroy her own limited freedoms and creative potential, symbolized by her unwanted pregnancy. Brack disillusions Hedda about the beauty of Eilert's death, revealing that her hero died meanly in another brothel fight rather than bravely defying a frustrated life (1504). Moreover, as a result of Eilert's death, Hedda loses her few cherished freedoms. Her power over her husband is usurped, as Thea and George devote their lives to resurrecting Eilert's manuscript from jumbled notes (1502-03); and Thea hopes to inspire George as she inspired Eilert (1506). Then Brack establishes power over Hedda through her fear of scandal, knowing that Eilert was shot with her pistol. With neither limited power nor illusions to sustain her, Hedda bows to Thea's beautiful hair and, after playing a last dance on the piano, admits defeat: "Not free. Still not free! . . . From now on I'll be quiet" (1506-07).

Hedda's tragedy is that she is denied the freedom to realize her creative potential, and so have the self-esteem that comes from personal achievement. Her attempt to retain her independence within society prevents her, through fear of scandal, from marrying the man with whom she might have had a relationship both individually satisfying and mutually supportive. In Hedda's suicide are seen the stifling of intellect and the emotional isolation caused by oppression, even within a commonplace bourgeois family where "People don't do such things!" (1507).

Sample Expository Essay

The essay below was written by Susan Chisholm for English 115 at the University of Victoria.

It gives some idea of ways of organizing, developing paragraphs, and providing support for arguments.

In Pursuit of Thinness

Throughout history and through a cross-section of cultures, women have transformed their appearance to conform to a beauty ideal. Ancient Chinese aristocrats bound their feet as a show of femininity; American and European women in the 1800s cinched in their waists so tightly, some suffered internal damage; in some African cultures women continue to wear plates in their lower lips, continually stretching the skin to receive plates of larger size. The North American ideal of beauty has continually focussed on women's bodies: the tiny waist of the Victorian period, the boyish figure in vogue during the flapper era, and the voluptuous curves that were the measure of beauty between the 1930s and 1950s. Current standards emphasize a toned, slender look, one that exudes fitness, youth, and health. According to psychologist Eva Szekely, "Having to be attractive at this time . . . means unequivocally having to be thin. In North America today, thinness is a precondition for being perceived by others and oneself as healthy" (19). However, this relentless pursuit of thinness is not just an example of women trying to look their best, it is also a struggle for control, acceptance and success.

In attempting to mould their appearance to meet the current ideal, numerous women are literally starving themselves to death. The incidence of eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, has "doubled during the last two decades" (Comerci 1294). This increase is no longer limited to women in their teens and twenties, but is increasingly diagnosed in patients in their thirties and forties. "No doubt, the current sociocultural emphasis on thinness and physical fitness as a symbol of beauty and success has contributed to this age distribution" (Comerci 1294).

One of the negative psychological side effects associated with eating disorders is the patient's distortion of their own body image, body image being defined as "the picture a person has in his mind of his own body, that is, the way his body appears to him" (Murray 602). For the anorexic this distortion is exaggerated, the patient feels fat even while emaciated, however, many women who are caught up in the relentless pursuit of thinness also experience some degree of disturbed body image. The experiences and practices of women who "simply diet" are not radically different from those who are diagnosed with eating disorders. For some women, achieving the "perfect" body form becomes the most important goal in life.

Feelings about body are closely related to a woman's sense of self; the "body is perceived as acceptable or unacceptable, providing a foundation for self-concept" (Orbach 78). It is alarming, then, that almost 80% of women think they're overweight (Kilbourne). Body image has very little to do with the way a person actually looks; many women who appear to fit the ideal body type are actually dissatisfied with their appearance (Freedman). Women with perfectly normal bodies see themselves as being heavy; so that the definition of "normal" becomes inaccurate and this perceived normalcy is represented by a very small percentage of women. It follows that if body image is so closely linked to self-image, it is important for women to learn to feel comfortable with the body they live in, despite any "imperfections". Consistently aiming for perfection is a "self-defeating goal that only sets you up for failure" (Freedman 218).

All evidence indicates that "our sense of our bodies develops in the process of learning and these are social processes, not psychobiological ones given at birth" (Szeckely 42). So why is it that during this process of development so many women become dissatisfied, self-critical, and judgemental about their own bodies? One of the reasons may have to do with the media and various forms of advertising. Ads sell more than just products; they present an idea of normalcy, who we are and who we should be (Kilbourne). Advertising is a major vehicle for presenting images and forming attitudes. The majority of ads incorporate young, beautiful, slender models to present their products and services. While individual ads may not be seen as a big issue, it is the cumulative, unconscious impact that has an effect on attitudes toward women, and in women's attitudes toward themselves. As women are consistently exposed to these feminine forms through both print and television, it becomes difficult to distinguish what is normal, and even more difficult not to compare themselves to this form. It is not just women who judge themselves, but also men who begin to liken these models to the women in their own lives and then make comparisons. Advertising creates an "ultimate standard of worth, so that women are judged against this standard all the time, whether we choose to be or not" (Kilbourne).

Throughout the media, there seems to be a "particular contempt these days for women who are fat or are in any way overweight . . . above all, we're supposed to be very thin" (Kilbourne). This notion of the ideal body that is propagated by the popular media can be linked with economic organizations whose profit is solely gained through products that enhance this image (Szeckely 103). The images that are presented in advertising are designed to create an illusion, a fantasy ideal that will keep women continually consuming. Advertisers are well aware of the insecurities that most women feel about their own bodies. The influential power of the diet, fashion, cosmetic and beauty industries? and their advertising strategies? target this, their "profits are sustained on the
enormity of the body insecurity" (Orbach 79).

The effect of many current advertising methods is that the "body is turned into a thing, an object, a package" (Kilbourne). In many ads, bodies are separated into individual parts: legs, breasts, thighs, waists; the result is that the body becomes separated from the woman. It then becomes acceptable for the woman's body to be scrutinized. Women's bodies receive large amounts of attention and comment and are a "vehicle for the expression of a wide range of statements" (Orbach 13). Judgements may be made and opinions may be formed about a woman by her appearance alone. A woman who is judged as overweight is often thought of as a woman with little self-control, and from this premise further assumptions may be made. This type of generalization occurs on a daily basis, by both men and women, and it affects the way we behave towards one another.

Our preoccupation with appearance affects much more that the image that is presented on the outside. Feelings toward our own appearance affect the choices we make and the goals we pursue; "more than ever, it seems we are constricted by beauty standards . . ." (Freedman 3). The recent emphasis on fitness, youth, beauty and thinness has caused many women to try harder than ever to attain the current body ideal. The tremendous increase in plastic surgery operations? liposuction, breast implants, tummy tucks, and face-lifts, to name a few? attest to the extreme adjustments that many women feel they must make in order to attain the body ideal, in turn making positive adjustments to their own self-esteem. "One object of women's hard work which, potentially is also a means of their success, is the body . . . women have been given the message that their efforts in improving and perfecting their bodies would be rewarded by success" (Szekely 191), on both a social and professional level. With that thought in mind, women have come to relate to their bodies "as their objects/tools/weapons in the marketplace of social relations" (Orbach).

Perhaps a woman's ability to control her own body size and weight can be seen as a metaphor, a substitution for control that may be lacking in other areas of her life. While women continue to struggle for equality on an economic scale and within their relationships, they still maintain control over their own bodies. It is important that women begin to accept themselves for who they are, regardless of their body type, and to feel comfortable with the body they live in. If women continue to pursue the "elusive, eternally youthful body beautiful" (Orbach 13) they'll only be setting themselves up for failure.

Works Cited


Overview of the Academic Essay
A clear sense of argument is essential to all forms of academic writing, for writing is thought made visible. Insights and ideas that occur to us when we encounter the raw material of the world—natural phenomena like the behavior of genes, or cultural phenomena, like texts, photographs and artifacts—must be ordered in some way so others can receive them and respond in turn. This give and take is at the heart of the scholarly enterprise, and makes possible that vast conversation known as civilization. Like all human ventures, the conventions of the academic essay are both logical and playful. They may vary in expression from discipline to discipline, but any good essay should show us a mind developing a thesis, supporting that thesis with evidence, deftly anticipating objections or counter-arguments, and maintaining the momentum of discovery.

Motive and Idea. An essay has to have a purpose or motive; the mere existence of an assignment or deadline is not sufficient. When you write an essay or research paper, you are never simply transferring information from one place to another, or showing that you have mastered a certain amount of material. That would be incredibly boring—and besides, it would be adding to the glut of pointless utterance. Instead, you should be trying to make the best possible case for an original idea you have arrived at after a period of research. Depending upon the field, your research may involve reading and rereading a text, performing an experiment, or carefully observing an object or behavior.

By immersing yourself in the material, you begin to discover patterns and generate insights, guided by a series of unfolding questions. From a number of possibilities, one idea emerges as the most promising. You try to make sure it is original and of some importance; there is no point arguing for something already known, trivial, or widely accepted.

Thesis and Development. The essay's thesis is the main point you are trying to make, using the best evidence you can marshal. Your thesis will evolve during the course of writing drafts, but everything that happens in your essay is directed toward establishing its validity. A given assignment may not tell you that you need to come up with a thesis and defend it, but these are the unspoken requirements of any scholarly paper.

Deciding upon a thesis can generate considerable anxiety. Students may think, "How can I have a new idea about a subject scholars have spent their whole lives exploring? I just read a few books in the last few days, and now I'm supposed to be an expert?" But you can be original on different scales. We can't possibly know everything that has been, or is being, thought or written by everyone in the world—even given the vastness and speed of the Internet. What is required is a rigorous, good faith effort to establish originality, given the demands of the assignment and the discipline. It is a good exercise throughout the writing process to stop periodically and reformulate your thesis as succinctly as possible so someone in another field could understand its meaning as well as its importance. A thesis can be relatively complex, but you should be able to distill its essence. This does not mean you have to give the game away right from the start. Guided by a clear understanding of the point you wish to argue, you can spark your reader's curiosity by first asking questions—the very questions that may have guided you in your research—and carefully building a case for the validity of your idea. Or you can start with a provocative observation, inviting your audience to follow your own path of discovery.

The Tension of Argument. Argument implies tension but not combative fireworks. This tension comes from the fundamental asymmetry between the one who wishes to persuade and those who must be persuaded. The common ground they share is reason. Your objective is to make a case so that any reasonable person would be convinced of the reasonableness of your thesis. The first task, even before you start to write, is gathering and ordering evidence, classifying it by kind and strength. You might decide to move from the smallest piece of evidence to the most impressive. Or you might start with the most convincing, then mention other supporting details afterward. You could hold back a surprising piece of evidence until the very end.
In any case, it is important to review evidence that could be used against your idea and generate responses to anticipated objections. This is the crucial concept of counter-argument. If nothing can be said against an idea, it is probably obvious or vacuous. (And if too much can be said against it, it’s time for another thesis.) By not indicating an awareness of possible objections, you might seem to be hiding something, and your argument will be weaker as a consequence. You should also become familiar with the various fallacies that can undermine an argument—the "straw man" fallacy, fallacies of causation and of analogy, etc.—and strive to avoid them.

The Structure of Argument. The heart of the academic essay is persuasion, and the structure of your argument plays a vital role in this. To persuade, you must set the stage, provide a context, and decide how to reveal your evidence. Of course, if you are addressing a community of specialists, some aspects of a shared context can be taken for granted. But clarity is always a virtue. The essay’s objective should be described swiftly, by posing a question that will lead to your thesis, or making a thesis statement. There is considerable flexibility about when and where this happens, but within the first page or two, we should know where we are going, even if some welcome suspense is preserved. In the body of the paper, merely listing evidence without any discernible logic of presentation is a common mistake. What might suffice in conversation is too informal for an essay. If the point being made is lost in a welter of specifics, the argument falters.

The most common argumentative structure in English prose is deductive: starting off with a generalization or assertion, and then providing support for it. This pattern can be used to order a paragraph as well as an entire essay. Another possible structure is inductive: facts, instances or observations can be reviewed, and the conclusion to be drawn from them follows. There is no blueprint for a successful essay; the best ones show us a focused mind making sense of some manageable aspect of the world, a mind where insightfulness, reason, and clarity are joined.

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Beginning the Academic Essay

The writer of the academic essay aims to persuade readers of an idea based on evidence. The beginning of the essay is a crucial first step in this process. In order to engage readers and establish your authority, the beginning of your essay has to accomplish certain business. Your beginning should introduce the essay, focus it, and orient readers.

Introduce the Essay. The beginning lets your readers know what the essay is about, the topic. The essay's topic does not exist in a vacuum, however; part of letting readers know what your essay is about means establishing the essay's context, the frame within which you will approach your topic. For instance, in an essay about the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech, the context may be a particular legal theory about the speech right; it may be historical information concerning the writing of the amendment; it may be a contemporary dispute over flag burning; or it may be a question raised by the text itself. The point here is that, in establishing the essay's context, you are also limiting your topic. That is, you are framing an approach to your topic that necessarily eliminates other approaches. Thus, when you determine your context, you simultaneously narrow your topic and take a big step toward focusing your essay. Here's an example.

When Kate Chopin's novel The Awakening was published in 1899, critics condemned the book as immoral. One typical critic, writing in the Providence Journal, feared that the novel might "fall into the hands of youth, leading them to dwell on things that only matured persons can understand, and promoting unholy imaginations and unclean desires" (150). A reviewer in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote that "there is much that is very improper in it, not to say positively unseemly."

The paragraph goes on. But as you can see, Chopin's novel (the topic) is introduced in the context of the critical and moral controversy its publication engendered.

Focus the Essay. Beyond introducing your topic, your beginning must also let readers know what the central issue is. What question or problem will you be thinking about? You can pose a question that will lead to your idea (in which case, your idea will be the answer to your question), or you can make a thesis statement. Or you can do both: you can ask a question and immediately suggest the answer that your essay will argue. Here's an example from an essay about Memorial Hall.

Further analysis of Memorial Hall, and of the archival sources that describe the process of building it, suggests that the past may not be the central subject of the hall but only a medium. What message, then, does the building convey, and why are the fallen soldiers of such importance to the alumni who built it? Part of the answer, it seems, is that Memorial Hall is an educational tool, an attempt by the Harvard community of the 1870s to influence the future by shaping our memory of their times. The commemoration of those students and graduates who died for the Union during the Civil War is one aspect of this alumni message to the future, but it may not be the central idea.

The fullness of your idea will not emerge until your conclusion, but your beginning must clearly indicate the direction your idea will take, must set your essay on that road. And whether you focus your essay by posing a question, stating a thesis, or combining these approaches, by the end of your beginning, readers should know what you're writing about, and why—and why they might want to read on.

Orient Readers. Orienting readers, locating them in your discussion, means providing information and explanations wherever necessary for your readers' understanding. Orienting is important throughout your essay, but it is crucial in the beginning. Readers who don't have the information they need to follow your discussion will get lost and quit reading. (Your teachers, of course, will trudge on.) Supplying the necessary information to orient your readers may be as simple as answering the journalist's questions of who, what, where, when, how, and why. It may mean providing a brief overview of events or a summary of the text you'll be analyzing. If the source text is brief, such as the First Amendment, you might just quote it. If the text is well known, your summary, for most audiences, won't need to be more than an identifying phrase or
two:

In Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare’s tragedy of ‘star-crossed lovers’ destroyed by the blood feud between their two families, the minor characters . . .

Often, however, you will want to summarize your source more fully so that readers can follow your analysis of it.

Questions of Length and Order. How long should the beginning be? The length should be proportionate to the length and complexity of the whole essay. For instance, if you’re writing a five-page essay analyzing a single text, your beginning should be brief, no more than one or two paragraphs. On the other hand, it may take a couple of pages to set up a ten-page essay.

Does the business of the beginning have to be addressed in a particular order? No, but the order should be logical. Usually, for instance, the question or statement that focuses the essay comes at the end of the beginning, where it serves as the jumping-off point for the middle, or main body, of the essay. Topic and context are often intertwined, but the context may be established before the particular topic is introduced. In other words, the order in which you accomplish the business of the beginning is flexible and should be determined by your purpose.

Opening Strategies. There is still the further question of how to start. What makes a good opening? You can start with specific facts and information, a keynote quotation, a question, an anecdote, or an image. But whatever sort of opening you choose, it should be directly related to your focus. A snappy quotation that doesn't help establish the context for your essay or that later plays no part in your thinking will only mislead readers and blur your focus. Be as direct and specific as you can be. This means you should avoid two types of openings:

1. The history-of-the-world (or long-distance) opening, which aims to establish a context for the essay by getting a long running start: "Ever since the dawn of civilized life, societies have struggled to reconcile the need for change with the need for order." What are we talking about here, political revolution or a new brand of soft drink? Get to it.

2. The funnel opening (a variation on the same theme), which starts with something broad and general and "funnels" its way down to a specific topic. If your essay is an argument about state-mandated prayer in public schools, don't start by generalizing about religion; start with the specific topic at hand.

Remember. After working your way through the whole draft, testing your thinking against the evidence, perhaps changing direction or modifying the idea you started with, go back to your beginning and make sure it still provides a clear focus for the essay. Then clarify and sharpen your focus as needed. Clear, direct beginnings rarely present themselves ready-made; they must be written, and rewritten, into the sort of sharp-eyed clarity that engages readers and establishes your authority.

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How to Write a Comparative Analysis

Throughout your academic career, you'll be asked to write papers in which you compare and contrast two things: two texts, two theories, two historical figures, two scientific processes, and so on. "Classic" compare-and-contrast papers, in which you weight A and B equally, may be about two similar things that have crucial differences (two pesticides with different effects on the environment) or two similar things that have crucial differences, yet turn out to have surprising commonalities (two politicians with vastly different world views who voice unexpectedly similar perspectives on sexual harassment).

In the "lens" (or "keyhole") comparison, in which you weight A less heavily than B, you use A as a lens through which to view B. Just as looking through a pair of glasses changes the way you see an object, using A as a framework for understanding B changes the way you see B. Lens comparisons are useful for illuminating, critiquing, or challenging the stability of a thing that, before the analysis, seemed perfectly understood. Often, lens comparisons take time into account: earlier texts, events, or historical figures may illuminate later ones, and vice versa.

Faced with a daunting list of seemingly unrelated similarities and differences, you may feel confused about how to construct a paper that isn't just a mechanical exercise in which you first state all the features that A and B have in common, and then state all the ways in which A and B are different. Predictably, the thesis of such a paper is usually an assertion that A and B are very similar yet not so similar after all. To write a good compare-and-contrast paper, you must take your raw data—the similarities and differences you've observed—and make them cohere into a meaningful argument. Here are the five elements required.

Frame of Reference. This is the context within which you place the two things you plan to compare and contrast; it is the umbrella under which you have grouped them. The frame of reference may consist of an idea, theme, question, problem, or theory; a group of similar things from which you extract two for special attention; biographical or historical information. The best frames of reference are constructed from specific sources rather than your own thoughts or observations. Thus, in a paper comparing how two writers redefine social norms of masculinity, you would be better off quoting a sociologist on the topic of masculinity than spinning out potentially banal-sounding theories of your own. Most assignments tell you exactly what the frame of reference should be, and most courses supply sources for constructing it. If you encounter an assignment that fails to provide a frame of reference, you must come up with one on your own. A paper without such a context would have no angle on the material, no focus or frame for the writer to propose a meaningful argument.

Grounds for Comparison. Let's say you're writing a paper on global food distribution, and you've chosen to compare apples and oranges. Why these particular fruits? Why not pears and bananas? The rationale behind your choice, the grounds for comparison, lets your reader know why your choice is deliberate and meaningful, not random. For instance, in a paper asking how the "discourse of domesticity" has been used in the abortion debate, the grounds for comparison are obvious; the issue has two conflicting sides, pro-choice and pro-life. In a paper comparing the effects of acid rain on two forest sites, your choice of sites is less obvious. A paper focusing on similarly aged forest stands in Maine and the Catskills will be set up differently from one comparing a new forest stand in the White Mountains with an old forest in the same region. You need to indicate the reasoning behind your choice.

Thesis. The grounds for comparison anticipates the comparative nature of your thesis. As in any argumentative paper, your thesis statement will convey the gist of your argument, which necessarily follows from your frame of reference. But in a compare-and-contrast, the thesis depends on how the two things you've chosen to compare actually relate to one another. Do they extend, corroborate, complicate, contradict, correct, or debate one another? In the most common compare-and-contrast paper—one focusing on differences—you can indicate the precise relationship between A and B by using the word "whereas" in your thesis:
Whereas Camus perceives ideology as secondary to the need to address a specific historical moment of colonialism, Fanon perceives a revolutionary ideology as the impetus to reshape Algeria's history in a direction toward independence.

Whether your paper focuses primarily on difference or similarity, you need to make the relationship between A and B clear in your thesis. This relationship is at the heart of any compare-and-contrast paper.

Organizational Scheme. Your introduction will include your frame of reference, grounds for comparison, and thesis. There are two basic ways to organize the body of your paper:

1. In text-by-text, you discuss all of A, then all of B.

2. In point-by-point, you alternate points about A with comparable points about B.

If you think that B extends A, you'll probably use a text-by-text scheme; if you see A and B engaged in debate, a point-by-point scheme will draw attention to the conflict. Be aware, however, that the point-by-point scheme can come off as a ping-pong game. You can avoid this effect by grouping more than one point together, thereby cutting down on the number of times you alternate from A to B. But no matter which organizational scheme you choose, you need not give equal time to similarities and differences. In fact, your paper will be more interesting if you get to the heart of your argument as quickly as possible. Thus, a paper on two evolutionary theorists' different interpretations of specific archaeological findings might have as few as two or three sentences in the introduction on similarities and at most a paragraph or two to set up the contrast between the theorists' positions. The rest of the paper, whether organized text-by-text or point-by-point, will treat the two theorists' differences.

You can organize a classic compare-and-contrast paper either text-by-text or point-by-point. But in a "lens" comparison, in which you spend significantly less time on A (the lens) than on B (the focal text), you almost always organize text-by-text. That's because A and B are not strictly comparable: A is merely a tool for helping you discover whether or not B's nature is actually what expectations have led you to believe it is.

Linking of A and B. All argumentative papers require you to link each point in the argument back to the thesis. Without such links, your reader will be unable to see how new sections logically and systematically advance your argument. In a compare-and contrast, you also need to make links between A and B in the body of your essay if you want your paper to hold together. To make these links, use transitional expressions of comparison and contrast (similarly, moreover, likewise, on the contrary, conversely, on the other hand) and contrastive vocabulary (in the example below, Southerner/Northerner).

As a girl raised in the faded glory of the Old South, amid mystical tales of magnolias and moonlight, the mother remains part of a dying generation. Surrounded by hard times, racial conflict, and limited opportunities, Julian, on the other hand, feels repelled by the provincial nature of home, and represents a new Southerner, one who sees his native land through a condescending Northerner's eyes.

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How To Be Original
Michael Barsanti

The best papers you can write for this class are ones that bring something new to our understanding of the works we are reading and watching. The best papers will try to teach us something we didn't already know, or will try to point out something we might have missed after only one or two readings. You may protest: "But smart critics have been writing about [insert text here] since long before I was born, and besides, we've been beating [insert text here] to death in class discussion for a week. There's no way I can say anything new or interesting about [insert text here]." These statements are wrong and unacceptably lame for at least the following two reasons. First, you're writing for a community that is, for the most part, new to these texts. There are lots of things your classmates do not know about them. Second, you come at these works with a unique set of experiences and interests--those interests will lead you to notice things in the texts that no one else will. The trick is to identify those things and to develop them into an essay. I've written down some brief thoughts on how to recognize and put to work original thoughts. Practice and prosper.

1. Listen to the Texts.

Many people make the mistake of thinking that disliking something means they don't have to pay attention to it. You have to pay attention to a text in order to say anything original about it. If a text or a film angers or bores you, become a connoisseur of anger and boredom. Develop a skill for expressing your hostility through an accurate and detailed critique, instead of a blunt and crude one. It's easier to pay attention to works you like, but it can be harder to keep at a good observing distance from them. In either case, keep in mind that just about everything you notice in these works is the product of a choice made by an artist and can be analyzed.

2. Pay Attention to Your Reactions.

As I've said before, most good papers start with a hunch, not a fully realized thesis. Most good papers start with... "I'm not sure why this is important, but it seemed strange to me that [fill in the blank]." It is imperative that you track down this hunch and write about it. While you are in pursuit of this strange thing that interests you, you may start to feel that you are B.S.'ing. This is perfectly normal and nothing to be worried about. Original thinking and B.S. are much more alike than you'd believe.

3. Think Small and Specific.

Focus on the details and let the big issues take care of themselves. Writing about trees in The Piano is more likely to generate something original than writing about true love in The Princess Bride.

4. Be Patient.

Don't expect to have something brilliant to say the instant you sit down at a computer. You need to take time to think, to plan, and most importantly, to write. Nothing generates ideas better than writing. A related rule: don't wait for a brilliant idea to come before you start to write. The ideas won't come, or if they do, they won't work after the first few paragraphs. Your thesis will change as your paper develops-- let it, and let the paper change again along with it. Do not assume that you will start with a master vision that will execute itself perfectly on paper and emerge fully intact 750 words later.

5. Develop an Intolerance for the Uninteresting and Insincere.

Learn to recognize the moments where you don't mean what you say, but are saying it anyway just to complete the structure of your argument. Remember that what bores you is even less interesting to your reader.
A thesis says something a little strange.
Consider the following examples:

A. By telling the story of Westley and Buttercup’s triumph over evil, *The Princess Bride* affirms the power of true love.
B. Although the main plot of *The Princess Bride* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks – baseball bats, tree branches, and swords – link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

I would argue that both of these statements are perfectly correct, but they are not both strange. Only the second one says something, well, weird. Weird is good. Sentence A encourages the paper to produce precisely the evidence that *The Princess Bride* presents explicitly; sentence B ensures that the paper will talk about something new.

*Romeo and Juliet* concerns the dangers of family pride, *Frankenstein* the dangers of taking science too far. Yup. How can you make those things unusual?

Good papers go out on a limb. They avoid ugly falls by reinforcing the limb with carefully chosen evidence and rigorous argumentation.

A. By telling a powerful story of failed love, *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrates the destructive effects of family pride.
B. Although we are told from the beginning that it is a tale of “star-crossed lovers,” *Romeo and Juliet* produces its tragedy by calling attention to a series of near misses, places where the protagonists’ downfall could be avoided.
C. Mercutio might seem like a minor character in *Romeo and Juliet*, but his language actually tells us something about the way the play works.

I would argue that all of these statements are perfectly correct, but they are not all strange. The first one says something obvious about the play; it is more of a moral than a thesis. Since the play tells us repeatedly about “the destructive effects of family pride,” your reader does not need a paper to point that fact out. The other two say something, well, weird. Weird is good. When you start to construct a thesis, think about what an easy one-sentence summary of the text would look like. Then try to come up with something more specific than that, something with a specific twist on the standard interpretation.

A thesis creates an argument that builds from one point to the next, giving the paper a direction that your reader can follow as the paper develops.

A. *The Rules* and Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* both tell women how to act.
B. By looking at *The Rules*, a modern conduct book for women, we can see how Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* is itself like a conduct book, questioning the rules for social success in her society and offering a new model.

This point often separates the best theses from the pack. A good thesis can prevent the two weakest ways of organizing a critical paper: the pile of information and the plot summary with comments. A paper that presents a pile of information will frequently introduce new paragraphs with transitions that simply indicate the addition of more stuff (“Another character who exhibits these traits is X,” for example). Example A above would almost inevitably lead to a paper organized as a pile of information. A plot summary with comments follows the chronological development of a text while picking out the same elements of every segment; a transition in such a paper might read, “In the next scene, the color blue also figures prominently.” Both of these approaches constitute too much of a good thing. Papers must compile evidence, of course, and following the chronology of a text can sometimes help a reader keep track of a paper’s argument. The best papers, however, will develop according to a more complex logic articulated in a strong thesis. Example B above would lead a paper to organize its evidence according to the paper’s own logic.

A thesis fits comfortably into the Magic Thesis Sentence (MTS).

The MTS: By looking at _______, we can see _______, which most readers don’t see; it is important to look at this aspect of the text because ________.

Try it out with the examples from the first point:

A. By telling the story of Westley and Buttercup’s triumph over evil, *The Princess Bride* affirms the power of true love.
B. Although the main plot of *The Princess Bride* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks – baseball bats, tree branches, and swords – link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.
Notice that the MTS adds a new dimension to point number one above. The first part of the MTS asks you to find something strange (“which readers don’t see”), and the second part asks you to think about the importance of the strangeness. Thesis A would not work at all in the MTS; one could not reasonably state that “most readers [or viewers] don’t see” that the film’s affirmation of true love, and the statement does not even attempt to explain the importance of its claim. Thesis B, on the other hand, gives us a way to complete the MTS, as in “By looking at the way fighting sticks link the plot and frame of The Princess Bride, we can see the way the grandson is trained in true love, which most people don’t see; it is important to look at this aspect of the text because unlike the rest of the film, the fighting sticks suggest that love is not natural but socialized.” One does not need to write out the MTS in such a neat one-sentence form, of course, but thinking through the structure of the MTS can help refine thesis ideas.

4. **A thesis says something about the texts you discuss exclusively.**
   If your thesis could describe many works equally well, it needs to be more specific. Let’s return to our examples from above:

   A. By telling the story of Westley and Buttercup’s triumph over evil, The Princess Bride affirms the power of true love.

   B. Although the main plot of The Princess Bride rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks — baseball bats, tree branches, and swords — link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

   Try substituting other works:

   A. By telling the story of Darcy and Elizabeth’s triumph over evil, Pride and Prejudice affirms the power of true love.

   Sure, that makes sense. Bad sign.

   B. Although the main plot of Pride and Prejudice rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks (baseball bats, tree branches, and swords) link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that it is not natural but socialized.

   Um, nope. Even if you have never read Pride and Prejudice, you can probably guess that such a precise thesis could hardly apply to other works. Good sign.

   A. By telling a powerful story of failed love, Romeo and Juliet demonstrates the destructive effects of family pride.

   B. Although we are told from the beginning that it is a tale of “star-crossed lovers,” Romeo and Juliet produces its tragedy by calling attention to a series of near misses, places where the protagonists’ downfall could be avoided.

   C. Mercutio might seem like a minor character in Romeo and Juliet, but his language actually tells us something important about how the play works.

   The worst offender by this standard would be a thesis such as “Romeo and Juliet is a powerful story of failed love.” There are thousands of stories of failed love in print or on screen, and you can probably think of a number of examples quickly. Example A above is a little more specific, but not enough: the destructive effects of family pride play a part in many books and films, whether they end happily or sadly.

   The other theses fare better. Example B uses a specific quotation and makes a claim that would not apply, for instance, to Hamlet. Example C certainly talks about a specific character in Romeo and Juliet, but it would pass this test better with a specific explanation of what exactly Mercutio’s language tells us “about how the play works.”

5. **A thesis makes a lot of information irrelevant.**
   If your thesis is specific enough, it will make a point that focuses on only a small part of the text you are analyzing. You can and should ultimately apply that point to the work as a whole, but a thesis will call attention to specific parts of it. Let’s look at those examples again. (This is the last time, I promise.)

   A. By telling the story of Westley and Buttercup’s triumph over evil, The Princess Bride affirms the power of true love.

   B. Although the main plot of The Princess Bride rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks — baseball bats, tree branches, and swords — link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

   One way of spotting the problem with example A is to note that a simple plot summary would support its point. That is not true of example B, which tells the reader exactly what moments the paper will discuss and why.
If you find that your paper leads you to mark relevant passages on virtually every page of a long work, you need to find a thesis that helps you focus on a smaller portion of the text. As the MTS reminds us, the paper would still strive to show the reader something new about the text as a whole, but a specific area of concentration will help, not hinder, that effort.

**Rotten First Drafts**

(the title of which is adapted from Anne Lamott’s essay of a slightly coarser name)

Michelle Iskra, Annie Dillard, Julia Cameron, et. al.

1. **Get everything down** about your topic that you can think of at once, in whatever way works for you. Turn off your inner critic and just get the ideas out. Allow this draft to stink; all first drafts do (just ask anyone who does it professionally).

2. **READ IT ALOUD.**

3. **Sketch out in words the essence of what you think you just wrote** (your working thesis), but modify this idea as you really get to know it.

4. **Organize** your initial draft as logically as you can. Try numbering your paragraphs, then create an outline reordering those numbers as they might best build your point. This step will reveal both gaps in your logic and strong, defensible opinions.

5. **Develop** each paragraph into a “mini-essay” by doing the following:
   - **Rework** paragraphs so that topic sentences are clear and relevant to your thesis in #3 – the topic sentence being a sort of sub-thesis. Of course, your reworking the paragraphs’ topic sentences may lead you to a major overhaul of the working thesis, but stay open to this possibility. Follow the course of the work, not the dictation of the thesis.
   - **Integrate** the necessary support to prove the truth of each topic sentence, whether it is specific example (in the absence of a text), or direct/paraphrased textual references (using a text or an interview).
   - **Comment** on the effectiveness of the relationship between the topic sentence and your chosen support.

6. **Actually draw a conclusion**, answering the all-important question, “Why should my reader care that I wrote this?” with “Well, this is why you should care…” And you cannot actually draw one until you’ve made your commitment and introduced this promising mess with conviction. As a parting statement, make a world connection based on issues broached in your essay. Avoid restating the thesis in the conclusion. Writers should also refrain from obvious statements like, “In conclusion” or “In sum.” If you are actually writing a conclusion, your reader will know. References to the thesis should be concerning its extension as a result of your brilliant, careful analysis, taking the point to another plane than the one it was on when you posed it. See the other advice that follows on conclusions.

7. **Revise** your essay using the advice on summary, analysis, transitions, revision, editing, proofreading, and what-have-you that follow. Be aware that this is a process, often requiring several iterations. One of the most important writers in American literature, F. Scott Fitzgerald, revised the entire novel, *Tender is the Night*, twelve times. Expect to have to do it.

Perhaps most importantly, allow this first draft to be terrible. You are merely providing the raw materials for your project when you first set down your ideas. They should be rough. Later, it is through the “re-seeing” of revision that you can refine what you’ve gotten down into what you really want to say and how those thoughts should properly be supported and explained. Be gentle with yourself but be ruthless with your text. Make it say what you think and feel.

Gretchen Polnac, long time AP Literature teacher, grader, and consultant for the College Board, says that the best writers are those who enter into a conversation with the reader, to non-judgmentally, non-dogmatically discuss ideas — to have a “parlor discussion,” to observe, weigh, and consider your (and other people’s) ideas.
Knowing how to summarize something you have read, seen, or heard is a valuable skill, one you have probably used in many writing assignments. It is important, though, to recognize when you must go beyond describing, explaining, and restating texts and offer a more complex analysis. This handout will help you distinguish between summary and analysis and avoid inappropriate summary in your academic writing.

Is summary a bad thing?

Not necessarily. But it's important that you keep your assignment and your audience in mind as you write. If your assignment requires an argument with a thesis statement and supporting evidence—as many academic writing assignments do—then you should limit the amount of summary in your paper. You might use summary to provide background, set the stage, or illustrate supporting evidence, but keep it very brief: a few sentences should do the trick. Most of your paper should focus on your argument.

Writing a summary of what you know about your topic before you start drafting your actual paper can sometimes be helpful. If you are unfamiliar with the material you're analyzing, you may need to summarize what you've read in order to understand your reading and get your thoughts in order. Once you figure out what you know about a subject, it's easier to decide what you want to argue.

You may also want to try some other pre-writing activities that can help you develop your own analysis. Outlining, free writing, and mapping make it easier to get your thoughts on the page.

Why is it so tempting to stick with summary and skip analysis?

Many writers rely too heavily on summary because it is what they can most easily write. If you're stalled by a difficult writing prompt, summarizing the plot of The Great Gatsby may be more appealing than staring at the computer for three hours and wondering what to say about F. Scott Fitzgerald's use of color symbolism. After all, the plot is usually the easiest part of a work to understand. Something similar can happen even when what you are writing about has no plot: if you don't really understand an author's argument, it might seem easiest to just repeat what he or she said.

To write a more analytical paper, you may need to review the text or film you are writing about, with a focus on the elements that are relevant to your thesis. If possible, carefully consider your writing assignment before reading, viewing, or listening to the material about which you'll be writing so that your encounter with the material will be more purposeful.

How do I know if I'm summarizing?

As you read through your essay, ask yourself the following questions:

Am I stating something that would be obvious to a reader or viewer?

Does my essay move through the plot, history, or author’s argument in chronological order, or in the exact same order the author used?

Am I simply describing what happens, where it happens, or who it happens to?

A "yes" to any of these questions may be a sign that you are summarizing. If you answer yes to the questions below, though, it is a
sign that your paper may have more analysis (which is usually a good thing):

Am I making an original argument about the text?

Have I arranged my evidence around my own points, rather than just following the author's or plot's order?

Am I explaining why or how an aspect of the text is significant?

Certain phrases are warning signs of summary. Keep an eye out for these:

"[This essay] is about…"

"[This book] is the story of…"

"[This author] writes about…"

"[This movie] is set in…"

Here's an example of an introductory paragraph containing unnecessary summary. Sentences that summarize are in italics:

The Great Gatsby is the story of a mysterious millionaire, Jay Gatsby, who lives alone on an island in New York. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote the book, but the narrator is Nick Carraway. Nick is Gatsby's neighbor, and he chronicles the story of Gatsby and his circle of friends, beginning with his introduction to the strange man and ending with Gatsby's tragic death. In the story, Nick describes his environment through various colors, including green, white, and grey. Whereas white and grey symbolize false purity and decay respectively, the color green offers a symbol of hope.

Here's how you might change the paragraph to make it a more effective introduction:

In The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald provides readers with detailed descriptions of the area surrounding East Egg, New York. In fact, Nick Carraway's narration describes the setting with as much detail as the characters in the book. Nick's description of his environment presents the book's themes, symbolizing significant aspects of the post-World War I era. Whereas white and grey symbolize the false purity and decay of the 1920s, the color green offers a symbol of hope.

This version of the paragraph mentions the book's title, author, setting, and narrator so that the reader is reminded of the text. And that sounds a lot like summary—but the paragraph quickly moves on to the writer's own main topic: the setting and its relationship to the main themes of the book. The paragraph then closes with the writer's specific thesis about the symbolism of white, grey, and green.

How do I write more analytically?

Analysis requires breaking something-like a story, poem, play, theory, or argument-into parts so you can understand how those parts work together to make the whole. Ideally, you should begin to analyze a work as you read or view it instead of waiting until after you're done—it may help you to jot down some notes as you read. Your notes can be about major themes or ideas you notice, as well as anything that intrigues, puzzles, excites, or irritates you. Remember, analytic writing goes beyond the obvious to discuss questions of how and why—so ask yourself those questions as you read.
The St. Martin's Handbook (the bulleted material below is quoted from p. 38) encourages readers to take the following steps in order to analyze a text:

- Identify evidence that supports or illustrates the main point or theme as well as anything that seems to contradict it.
- Consider the relationship between the words and the visuals in the work. Are they well integrated, or are they sometimes at odds with one another? What functions do the visuals serve? To capture attention? To provide more detailed information or illustration? To appeal to readers' emotions?
- Decide whether the sources used are trustworthy.
- Identify the work's underlying assumptions about the subject, as well as any biases it reveals.

Once you have written a draft, some questions you might want to ask yourself about your writing are "What's my point?" or "What am I arguing in this paper?" If you can't answer these questions, then you haven't gone beyond summarizing. You may also want to think about how much of your writing comes from your own ideas or arguments. If you're only reporting someone else's ideas, you probably aren't offering an analysis.

**What strategies can help me avoid excessive summary?**

- Read the assignment (the prompt) as soon as you get it. Make sure to reread it before you start writing. Go back to your assignment often while you write.
- Formulate an argument (including a good thesis) and stick to it, including aspects of the plot, story, history, background, etc. only as evidence for your argument.
- Read critically -- imagine having a dialogue with the work you are discussing. With what parts of it do you agree or disagree? What questions do you have about the work? Does it remind you of other works you've seen?
- Make sure you have clear topic sentences that make arguments in support of your thesis statement.
- Use two different highlighters to mark your paper. With one color, highlight areas of summary or description. With the other, highlight areas of analysis. A good paper should have lots of analysis and minimal summary/description.
- Ask yourself: What part of the essay would be obvious to a reader/viewer of the work being discussed? What parts (words, sentences, paragraphs) of the essay could be deleted without loss? In most cases, your paper should focus on points that are essential and that will be interesting to people who have already read or seen the work you are writing about.

**But I'm writing a review! Don't I have to summarize?**

Probably not. If you're writing a critique of something, you don't necessarily need to give away much of the plot. The point is to let readers decide whether they want to enjoy the book or film for themselves. If you do summarize, keep your summary brief and to the point.

Instead of telling your readers that the play, book, or film was "boring," "interesting," or "really good," tell them specifically what
parts of the work you're talking about. It's also important that you go beyond adjectives and explain how the work achieved its effect (how was it interesting?) and why you think the author/director wanted the audience to react a certain way.

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**Transitioning: Beware of Velcro**

As the writer of an essay, imagine yourself crossing a river, guiding a troop of avid readers. You bring an armful of stones to lay down and step on as you go; each stone is a sentence or paragraph that speaks to and develops the essay's thesis, or central question. If you find yourself in the middle of the river with another mile to shore but only a few more stones, you can't finesse such a situation. You can't ask your readers to follow you and jump too broad a span.

In such a case, stop. Ask yourself if you need more stones—more sentences or paragraphs—or if perhaps you have already used ones that more properly belong ahead. On a second look, you may decide that the distance between stones is not that great, after all; perhaps your reader only needs a hand of assistance to get from one stone, or paragraph, to the next. In an essay, such assistance can be offered in the form of a "furthermore" or "in addition to" or "therefore." These are called transitional words and phrases.

Transitional words or phrases sometimes will be precisely what you need to underscore for your readers the intellectual relationship between sentences or paragraphs—to help them navigate your essay. Very often, such transitions

- address an essential similarity or dissimilarity (likewise, in the same way, on the other hand, despite, in contrast);
- suggest a meaningful ordering, often temporal (first, second, at the same time, later, finally) or causal (thus, therefore, accordingly, because);
- in a longer paper, remind the reader of what has earlier been argued (in short, as has been said, on the whole).

Keep in mind that although transitional words and phrases can be useful, even gracious, they never should be applied to force a vagrant paragraph into a place where it does not, structurally, belong. No reader will be fooled by such shoddy craft, which is designed to help the writer finesse the essay's flaws, rather than to illuminate for the reader the connections among the essay's ideas and textual evidence. A strip of Velcro on a cracked wall will not fool us into thinking we are standing somewhere safe; neither will a Velcro transition persuade an essay's readers that they are in the hands of a serious writer with something serious to say. In the absence of genuine intellectual connection, such efforts at transition all sound manufactured. The human voice has been drained off, and what's left is hollow language.

Velcro transitions insult and bore the reader by pointing out the obvious, generally in a canned and pompous way. Here are some examples:

- It is also important to note that ... Thus, it can be said that ... Another important aspect to realize is that ... Also, this shows that...

This is not to say that such phrases never can be used in an essay. Of course they can, mostly for summary. Just don't use them indiscriminately. Be careful, and be honest. Don't talk down to the reader. If you tell a reader that something "is important to note," make sure there's a very good chance the reader would not have realized this if you hadn't pointed it out. And never overdo such phrases; after all*, everything in your essay ought to be important to note. **In other words, be aware that, in a well-crafted essay, every sentence is a transitional sentence.**

This shouldn't be as intimidating as it might at first sound. **Rather**, this is another way of saying that transitions are important not simply between paragraphs. **Instead**, the necessity to transition occurs among the sentences within a paragraph, and from paragraph to paragraph. A paragraph ought to follow logically from the one preceding, and move the argument towards the paragraph that follows. **Again**, this is no cause for alarm on the part of the writer. It's simply another way of saying that, just as the sentence itself has internal logic and coherence, so does the paragraph; and so does the essay as a whole.

**Tips for Transitioning**

**Quite often**, if you are having a terrible time figuring out how to get from one paragraph to the next, it may be because you shouldn't be getting from one paragraph to the next quite yet, or even ever; there may be something crucial missing between this paragraph and its neighbors—most likely an idea or a piece of evidence or both. Maybe the paragraph is misplaced, and logically belongs elsewhere. The reason you can't come up with a gracious connective sentence is that there's simply too large an intellectual span to cross, or that you've gone off in the wrong direction.

Before you can go on, some causality needs first to be explicated, some other piece of evidence offered. You have to guide the
reader safely to the next idea by making certain that everything that should have been discussed by this point has in fact been thoroughly discussed. While it is true that an essay is a conversation between a writer and a reader, in which the reader's questions and concerns are internalized and addressed by the writer at the appropriate times, it is also true that even the most committed reader cannot read your mind. You have to guide your reader.

As has been discussed above, it is also useful to note that transitions between paragraphs that really do belong where they are in the essay can be strengthened by the repetition or paraphrasing of one paragraph's key words into the next. Such repetition or paraphrasing of key words, however, can be little more than Velcro if the writer really has nothing more to say, as is now the case.

* Underlined words and phrases function as transitions. Try reading without them; you'll see that the ideas remain in logical order. Such words and phrases, however, make life easier for the reader. They never substitute for intellectual coherence.

** Ick! Velcro—beware!

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Ending the Essay: Conclusions

So much is at stake in writing a conclusion. This is, after all, your last chance to persuade your readers to your point of view, to impress yourself upon them as a writer and thinker. And the impression you create in your conclusion will shape the impression that stays with your readers after they've finished the essay.

The end of an essay should therefore convey a sense of completeness and closure as well as a sense of the lingering possibilities of the topic, its larger meaning, its implications: the final paragraph should close the discussion without closing it off.

To establish a sense of closure, you might do one or more of the following:

Conclude by linking the last paragraph to the first, perhaps by reiterating a word or phrase you used at the beginning.

Conclude with a sentence composed mainly of one-syllable words. Simple language can help create an effect of understated drama.

Conclude with a sentence that's compound or parallel in structure; such sentences can establish a sense of balance or order that may feel just right at the end of a complex discussion.

To close the discussion without closing it off, you might do one or more of the following:

Conclude with a quotation from or reference to a primary or secondary source, one that amplifies your main point or puts it in a different perspective. A quotation from, say, the novel or poem you're writing about can add texture and specificity to your discussion; a critic or scholar can help confirm or complicate your final point.

For example, you might conclude an essay on the idea of home in James Joyce's short story collection, *Dubliners*, with information about Joyce's own complex feelings towards Dublin, his home. Or you might end with a biographer's statement about Joyce's attitude toward Dublin, which could illuminate his characters' responses to the city. Just be cautious, especially about using secondary material: make sure that you get the last word.

Conclude by setting your discussion into a different, perhaps larger, context. For example, you might end an essay on nineteenth-century muckraking journalism by linking it to a current newsmagazine program like *60 Minutes*.

Conclude by redefining one of the key terms of your argument.

For example, an essay on Marx's treatment of the conflict between wage labor and capital might begin with Marx's claim that the "capitalist economy is . . . a gigantic enterprise of dehumanization"; the essay might end by suggesting that Marxist analysis is itself dehumanizing because it construes everything in economic rather than moral or ethical terms.

Conclude by considering the implications of your argument (or analysis or discussion).

What does your argument imply, or involve, or suggest? For example, an essay on the novel *Ambiguous Adventure*, by the Senegalese writer Cheikh Hamidou Kane, might open with the idea that the protagonist's development suggests Kane's belief in the need to integrate Western materialism and Sufi spirituality in modern Senegal. The conclusion might make the new but related point that the novel on the whole suggests that such an integration is (or isn't) possible.

Finally, some advice on how to end an essay:

Don't simply summarize your essay. A brief summary of your argument may be useful, especially if your essay is long - more than ten pages or so. But shorter essays tend not to require a restatement of your main ideas.

Avoid phrases like "in conclusion," "to conclude," "in summary," and "to sum up." These phrases can be useful, even welcome, in oral presentations. But readers can see, by the tell-tale compression of the pages, when an essay is about to end. You'll irritate your audience if you belabor the obvious.

Resist the urge to apologize. If you've immersed yourself in your subject, you now know a good deal more about it than you can possibly include in a five- or ten- or 20-page essay. As a result, by the time you've finished writing, you may be having some doubts about what you've produced. (And if you haven't immersed yourself in your subject, you may be feeling even more doubtful about your essay as you approach the conclusion.) Repress those doubts. Don't undercut your authority by saying things like, "this is just one approach to the subject; there may be other, better approaches. . ."

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Things to avoid in writing conclusions (from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Writing Center):

- Ending with a rephrased thesis statement that contains no substantive changes.
- Introducing a new idea or subtopic (although you may end with a provocative question; see below)
- Focusing on a minor point in the essay.
- Concluding with a sentence tacked on to your final point.
- Apologizing for your view by saying such things as, “I may not be an expert,” or “At least this is my opinion.”
- Attempting to make up for an incomplete structure. (If you say you will discuss four books and attempt a complete discussion of two books, do not try to cover the remaining texts in a concluding paragraph. In such a situation, it’s best to limit your paper to topics you can realistically cover).

Conclude your essay with the following:

- Include a brief summary of the paper’s main points.
- Ask a provocative question.
- Use a quotation.
- Evoke a vivid image.
- Call for some sort of action.
- End with a warning.
- Universalize (compare to other situations).
- Suggest results or consequences.
- Refer to the introductory paragraph’s metaphor, language, or parallel concepts and images.

Four Kinds of Ineffective Conclusions

The "That's My Story and I'm Sticking to It" Conclusion. This conclusion just restates the thesis and is usually painfully short. It does not push the ideas forward. People write this kind of conclusion when they can’t think of anything else to say. Example: In conclusion, Frederick Douglass was, as we have seen, a pioneer in American education, proving that education was a major force for social change with regard to slavery.

The "Sherlock Holmes: Conclusion. Sometimes writers will state the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion. You might be tempted to use this strategy if you don’t want to give everything away too early in your paper. You may think it would be more dramatic to keep the reader in the dark until the end and then "wow" her with your main idea, much like a Sherlock Holmes mystery. The reader, however, does not expect a mystery, but an analytical discussion of your topic in an academic style, with the main argument (thesis) stated up front. Example: (After a paper that lists numerous incidents from the book but never says what these incidents reveal about Douglass and his views on education): So, as the evidence above demonstrates, Douglass saw education as a way to undermine the slaveholders' power and also an important step toward freedom.

The "America the Beautiful"/"I Am Woman"/"We Shall Overcome" Conclusion. This kind of conclusion usually draws on emotion to make its appeal, but while this emotion and even sentimentality may be very heartfelt, it is usually out of character with the rest of an analytical paper. A more sophisticated commentary, rather than emotional praise, would be a more fitting tribute to the topic. Bad Example: Because of the efforts of fine Americans like Frederick Douglass, countless others have seen the shining beacon of light that is education. His example was a torch that lit the way for others. Frederick Douglass was truly an American hero.
The "Grab Bag" Conclusion. This kind of conclusion includes extra information that the writer found or thought of but couldn't integrate into the main paper. You may find it hard to leave out details that you discovered after hours of research and thought, but adding random facts and bits of evidence at the end of an otherwise-well-organized essay can just create confusion. Bad Example: In addition to being an educational pioneer, Frederick Douglass provides an interesting case study for masculinity in the American South. He also offers historians an interesting glimpse into slave resistance when he confronts Covey, the overseer. His relationships with female relatives reveal the importance of family in the slave community.
Reorganizing your Draft

Why Reorganize?

A lot of students who come to the Writing Center wonder whether their draft "flows" -- that is, whether the ideas are connected in a logical order to make a compelling argument. If you're worried about "flow," chances are you're already sensing some problems with your organizational scheme. It's time to reorganize!

Prerequisites

Three prerequisites will help you reorganize your draft. One is vital: a working thesis statement to give you a focus for organizing. If you're having trouble with this, see our thesis statement handout before you try to reorganize. Two other things you might want to check before you begin to reorganize are your paragraph development and your transition sentences.

Strategies

Here are five strategies you can use to reorganize. Read through all of them before you begin and decide which seems like the best fit for solving the problems you see in your draft.

Strategy 1. Reverse Outlining

Let's say your paper is about Huckleberry Finn, and your working thesis is: "In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore." You feel uncertain if your paper really follows through on the thesis as promised.

This paper may benefit from reverse outlining, in order to help it realize its promising thesis. Your aim is to create an outline of what you've already written, as opposed to the kind of outline that you make before you begin to write. The reverse outline will help you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of both your organization and your argument.

Read the draft and take notes

Read your draft over, and as you do so, make very brief notes in the margin about what each paragraph is trying to accomplish.

Outline the Draft

After you've read through the entire draft, transfer the brief notes to a fresh sheet of paper, listing them in the order in which they appear. You'll get something like this:

Paragraph 1: Intro

Paragraph 2: Background on Huck Finn

Paragraph 3: River for Huck and Jim

Paragraph 4: Shore and laws for Huck and Jim

Paragraph 5: Shore and family, school
Paragraph 6: River and freedom, democracy

Paragraph 7: River and shore similarities

Paragraph 8: Conclusion

Examine the Outline

Look for repetition and other organizational problems. In the reverse outline above, there's a problem somewhere in Paragraphs 3-7, where the potential for repetition is high because you keep moving back and forth between river and shore.

Re-examine the Thesis, the Outline, and the Draft Together

Look closely at the outline and see how well it supports the argument in your thesis statement. You should be able to see which paragraphs need rewriting, reordering or rejecting. You may find some paragraphs are tangential or irrelevant to the focus of your argument or that some paragraphs have more than one idea and need reworking.

Strategy 2. Talk It Out

Let's say you're writing about Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, and your working thesis is: "The New Deal was actually a conservative defense of American capitalism."

This strategy forces to explain your thinking to someone else.

Find a Friend, your T.A., your Professor, a relative, a Writing Center tutor, or any sympathetic and intelligent listener.

Since we are more accustomed to talking than to writing, the ways we explain things out loud often makes more sense both to us and to our audience than when we first write them down. Pressure, anxiety, and expectations can cloud our writing, so it's a good idea just to talk about ideas in order to relieve some of those feelings.

Explain What Your Paper Is About

Pay attention to how you explain your argument verbally. Chances are that the order in which you present your ideas and evidence to your listener is a logical way to arrange them in your paper. Let's say that you begin (as you did above) with the working thesis. As you continue to explain, you realize that even though your draft doesn't mention "private enterprise" until the last two paragraphs, you begin to talk about it right away. This fact should tell you that you probably need to discuss private enterprise near the beginning.

Take Notes

You and your listener should keep track of the way you explain your paper. You probably won't remember it all if you don't, and then you'll just rely on what you've already written. Compare the structure of the argument in the notes to the structure of the draft you've written.

Get Your Listener to Ask Questions

As the writer, it is in your interest to receive constructive criticism so that your draft will become stronger. You want your listener
to say things like, "Would you mind explaining that point about being both conservative and liberal again? I wasn't sure I followed" or "What kind of economic principle is government relief? Is it communist? Archaic? Ridiculous?" Questions you can't answer may signal an unnecessary tangent or an area needing further development in the draft. Questions you need to think about will probably make you realize that you need to explain more your paper. In short, you want to know that your listener fully understands you; if not, chances are your readers won't, either.

**Strategy 3: Listing and Narrowing Your Argument**

Let's say you're writing a history paper, and your working thesis is this: "Although both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions."

What might be giving you trouble with organization is that you've created some very broad categories to work with (slavery, morality, institutions). They're all relevant to the Civil War, but there's only so much you can do in a three-, five-, or even ten-page paper. If you look more closely, you can narrow your argument by finding more specific terms; narrowing your argument will, in turn, help you rethink your organization.

In a compare and contrast paper, where you distinguish between and explain two sides of an issue, listing can help clarify both the organization and the argument.

**Make a list**

In two columns, list the reasons why each side fought the Civil War, limiting yourself to ones you address (however briefly) in your draft. Let's say you come up with the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>slavery</td>
<td>slavery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moral issues</td>
<td>self government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humane treatment</td>
<td>right to property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>against tyranny</td>
<td>against tyranny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>against oppression of slaves</td>
<td>against federal government oppression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, some of the issues pertain to both sides and some just to one or the other. Thus, the listing process should relatively quickly confirm whether the draft obeys the argument laid out in the working thesis.

**Re-examine the thesis**

You can now see that the draft offers clearer terms for your argument. A revised thesis statement might now read: *Both sides fought against tyranny and oppression, but while the South fought for the political and economic rights of slave owners, the North fought for the human rights of slaves.* This revised thesis offers more specifics, which should help you organize your draft more successfully by narrowing the
scope.

**Re-examine the draft’s general structure**

It seems from the list and the revised thesis statement that you probably want to establish the similarities first and then explain the differences. Check your draft; did you begin with the similarities and move on to the differences? If not, you need to reorganize.

**Reorganize the argument**

You still need to ask yourself which differences are most important. The order in which you present your points generally reflects a hierarchy of significance for your readers to follow.

**Strategy 4: Sectioning**

Let's say you're working on a paper in which you argue for euthanasia on the grounds that it reflects humane values, respects individual autonomy, and reduces needless costs.

**Sectioning** works particularly well for long papers where you will be contending with a number of ideas and a complicated argument. It's also useful if you are having difficulty distinguishing between the goals of each paragraph.

**Put Paragraphs under Section Headings**

Your argument has three categories of support. Put each of your paragraphs into one of the three categories: values, autonomy, and costs. If any paragraph, beyond the introduction or conclusion, fits into two categories or all three, you may need to look at our paragraph development handout. If some paragraphs don't fit any category, then they probably don't belong in the paper.

**Re-examine each Section**

Assuming you have more than one paragraph under each section, try to distinguish between them. For example, under "Humane Values" you might have placed an argument in favor of and a counterargument (with which you presumably strengthen your position). Or perhaps you have two arguments in favor of that can be distinguished from each other by author, logic, ethical principles invoked, etc. Write down the distinctions -- they will help you formulate clear topic sentences. If the distinctions can only be made within paragraphs themselves -- for example, one paragraph presents two arguments and one counterargument -- you probably need to revisit paragraph development.

**Re-examine the Entire Argument**


**Strategy 5: Visualizing**

Many people find that a visual brainstorming technique called clustering, mapping, or webbing is a good tool for rethinking a draft's organization.
**Rewriting is the essence of writing well—where the game is won or lost.** -William Zinsser

**What Does it Mean to Revise?**

Revision literally means to "see again," to look at something from a fresh, critical perspective. It is an ongoing process of rethinking the paper: reconsidering your arguments, reviewing your evidence, refining your purpose, reorganizing your presentation, reviving stale prose.

**But I thought revision was just fixing the commas and spelling.**

Nope. That's called proofreading. It's an important step before turning your paper in, but if your ideas are predictable, your thesis is weak, and your organization is a mess, then proofreading will just be putting a band-aid on a bullet wound. When you finish revising, that's the time to proofread.

**How about if I just reword things: look for better words, avoid repetition, etc.? Is that revision?**

Well, that's a part of revision called editing. It's another important final step in polishing your work. But if you haven't thought through your ideas, then rephrasing them won't make any difference.

**Why is Revision Important?**

Writing is a process of discovering, and you don't always produce your best stuff when you first get started. So revision is a chance for you to look critically at what you have written to see

- if it's really worth saying,
- if it says what you wanted to say, and
- if a reader will understand what you're saying.

**The Process**

**What steps should I use when I begin to revise?**

Here are several things to do. But don't try them all at one time. Instead, focus on two or three main areas during each revision session.

Wait awhile after you've finished a draft before looking at it again. The Roman poet Horace thought one should wait nine years, but that's a bit much. A day--a few hours even--will work. When you do return to the draft, be honest with yourself and don't be lazy. Ask yourself what you really think about the paper.

As the Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers puts it, "THINK BIG, don't tinker" (61). At this stage, you should be concerned with the large issues in the paper, not the commas.
Check the focus of the paper: Is it appropriate to the assignment? Is the topic too big or too narrow? Do you stay on track through the entire paper?

Think honestly about your thesis: Do you still agree with it? Should it be modified in light of something you discovered as you wrote the paper? Does it make a sophisticated, provocative point, or does it just say what anyone could say if given the same topic? Does your thesis generalize instead of taking a specific position? Should it be changed altogether?

Think about your purpose in writing: Does your introduction state clearly what you intend to do? Will your aims be clear to your readers?

**What are some other steps I should consider in later stages of the revision process?**

Examine the balance within your paper: Are some parts out of proportion with others? Do you spend too much time on one trivial point and neglect a more important point? Do you give lots of detail early on and then let your points get thinner by the end?

Check that you have kept your promises to your readers: Does your paper follow through with what the thesis promises? Do you support all the claims in your thesis? Is the tone and formality of language appropriate for your audience?

Check the organization: Does your paper follow a pattern that makes sense? Do the transitions move your readers smoothly from one point to the next? Do the topic sentences of each paragraph appropriately introduce what that paragraph is about? Would your paper work better if you moved some things around?

Check your information: Are all your facts accurate? Are any of your statements misleading? Have you provided enough detail to satisfy readers' curiosity? Have you cited all your information appropriately?

Check your conclusion: Does the last paragraph tie the paper together smoothly and end on a stimulating note, or does the paper just die a slow, redundant, lame or abrupt death?

**Whoa! I thought I could just revise in a few minutes.**

Sorry.

**But I don't want to rewrite my whole paper!**

Revision doesn't necessarily mean rewriting the whole paper. Sometimes it means revising the thesis to match what you've discovered while writing. Sometimes it means coming up with stronger arguments to defend your position, or coming up with more vivid examples to illustrate your points. Sometimes it means shifting the order of your paper to help the reader follow your argument, or to change the emphasis of your points. Sometimes it means adding or deleting material for balance or emphasis.

And then, sadly, sometimes revision does mean trashing your first draft and starting from scratch. Better than having the teacher trash your final paper.

**But I work so hard on what I write that I can't afford to throw any of it away.**

If you want to be a polished writer, then you will eventually find out that you can't afford NOT to throw stuff away. As writers, we often produce lots of stuff that needs to be tossed. The idea or metaphor or paragraph that I think is most wonderful and
brilliant is often the very thing that confuses my reader or ruins the tone of my piece or interrupts the flow of my argument. A writing teacher once told my class to "Kill your babies." Sorry for the grim image, but she meant that writers must be willing to sacrifice their favorite bits of writing for the good of the piece as a whole. In order to trim though, you have to have plenty of material on the page. One trick is not to hinder yourself while you are composing the first draft because the more you produce, the more you will have to work with when cutting time comes.

**But sometimes I revise as I go.**

That's OK. Since writing is a circular process, you don't do everything in some specific order. Sometimes you write something and then tinker with it before moving on. But be warned: there are two potential problems with revising as you go. One is that if you just revise as you go along, you never get to think of the big picture. The key is still to give yourself enough time to look at the essay as a whole once you've finished. Another danger to revising as you go is that you may short-circuit your creativity. If you spend too much time tinkering with what is on the page, you may lose some of what hasn't yet made it to the page. Here's a tip: Don't proofread as you go. You may waste time correcting the commas in a sentence that may end up being cut anyway.

**How do I go about the process of revising? Any tips?**

- Work from hardcopy; it's easier on the eyes. Also, problems that seem invisible on the screen somehow tend to show up better on paper.
- Another tip is to read the paper out loud. That's one way to see how well things flow.
- Remember all those questions listed above? Don't try to tackle all of them in one draft. Pick a few "agendas" for each draft so that you won't go mad trying to see all at once if you've done everything.
- Ask lots of questions and don't flinch from answering them truthfully. For example, ask if there are opposing viewpoints that you haven't considered yet.

**Concerns**

*What can get in the way of good revision strategies?*

Don't fall in love with what you have written. If you do, you will be hesitant to change it even if you know it's not great. Start out with a working thesis, and don't act like you're married to it. Instead, act like you're dating it, seeing if you're compatible, finding out what it's like in the morning. If a better-looking thesis comes along, dump the old one. Also, don't think of revision as just rewording. It is a chance to look at the entire paper, not just isolated words and sentences.

*What happens if I find that I no longer agree with my own point?*

If you take revision seriously, sometimes the process will lead you to questions you cannot answer, objections or exceptions to your thesis, cases that don't fit, loose ends or contradictions that just won't go away. If this happens (and it will if you think long enough), then you have several choices. You could choose to ignore the loose ends and hope your reader doesn't notice them, but that's risky. You could change your thesis completely to fit your new understanding of the issue, or you could adjust your thesis slightly to accommodate the new ideas. Or you could simply acknowledge the contradictions and show why your main point still holds up in spite of them. Most readers know there are no easy answers, so they may be annoyed if you give them a thesis and try to claim that it is always true with no exceptions no matter what.
How do I get really good at revising?

The same way you get really good at golf, piano, or a video game - do it often. Take revision seriously, be disciplined, and set high standards for yourself. Here are three more tips:

- The more you produce, the more you can cut.
- The more you can imagine yourself as a reader looking at this for the first time, the easier it will be to spot potential problems.
- The more you demand of yourself in terms of clarity and elegance, the more clear and elegant your writing will be.

How do I revise at the sentence level?

Read your paper out loud, sentence by sentence, and follow Peter Elbow's advice: "Look for places where you stumble or get lost in the middle of a sentence. These are obvious awkwardness's that need fixing. Look for places where you get distracted or even bored where you cannot concentrate. These are places where you probably lost focus or concentration in your writing. Cut through the extra words or vagueness or digression; get back to the energy. Listen even for the tiniest jerk or stumble in your reading, the tiniest lessening of your energy or focus or concentration as you say the words . . . A sentence should be alive" (Writing with Power 135).

Practical advice for ensuring that your sentences are alive:

- Use forceful verbs - replace long verb phrases with a more specific verb. For example, replace "She argues for the importance of the idea" with "She defends the idea."

- Look for places where you've used the same word or phrase twice or more in consecutive sentences and look for alternative ways to say the same thing OR for ways to combine the two sentences.

- Cut as many prepositional phrases as you can without losing your meaning. For instance, the following sentence, "There are several examples of the issue of integrity in Huck Finn," would be much better this way, "Huck Finn repeatedly addresses the issue of integrity."

- Check your sentence variety. If more than two sentences in a row start the same way (with a subject followed by a verb, for example), then try using introductory clauses.

- Aim for precision in word choice. Don't settle for the best word you can think of at the moment - use a thesaurus (along with a dictionary) to search for the word that says exactly what you want to say.

- Look for sentences that start with "It is" or "There are" and mark through them with heavy black marker and swear that in the future you will use such constructions only in the most desperate cases.

I don't have time for revising.

Of course you won't if you start your paper the day before it is due. So in the future please, please start early. That way you can give yourself some time to come back to look at what you've written with a fresh pair of eyes. It's amazing how something that
sounded brilliant the moment you wrote it can prove to be less-than-brilliant when you give it a chance to incubate.

**Whenever I revise, I just make things worse. I do my best work without revising.**

That's a common misconception that sometimes arises from fear, sometimes from laziness. The truth is, though, that except for those rare moments of inspiration or genius when the perfect ideas expressed in the perfect words in the perfect order flow gracefully and effortlessly from the mind, all experienced writers revise their work. I wrote six drafts of this handout. Hemingway rewrote the last page of A Farewell to Arms thirty-nine times. If you're still not convinced, re-read some of your old papers. How do they sound now? What would you revise if you had a chance?

**Where would I go to find more in-depth discussions of revision?**


*From http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/revision.html*
Having drafted your essay, you have gained the perspective of hindsight. Was the subject matter more complex than you anticipated? Did your preconceived ideas prove less interesting than discoveries you made while writing? Would you like to revise, but feel uncertain about how to do so?

**How to revise:**

Put your draft aside. Time away from your essay will allow for more objective self-evaluation.

Get feedback. Since you already know what you're trying to say, you aren't always the best judge of where the draft is clear or unclear. Let another reader tell you. Then discuss aloud what you were trying to achieve. In articulating for someone else what you meant to argue, you will clarify ideas for yourself.

Construct a backward-outline of your essay. Identify the main idea(s) in each paragraph. Rank their importance in advancing your thesis. Consider connections between and among ideas.

Rethink your thesis. Based on what you did in the previous step, restructure your argument: reorder your points, cut irrelevancies or redundancies, add complications and implications. You may want to return to the text for additional evidence.

Now that you know what you're really arguing, work on the introduction and conclusion. Make sure to begin your paragraphs with topic sentences, linking idea(s) in each paragraph to those proposed in the thesis.

Proofread. Aim for precision and economy in language. Read aloud so you can hear stylistic infelicities. (Your ear will pick up what your eye has missed.)

**An example of revision:**

In 1969, E. B. White wrote a one-paragraph comment on the first moon walk. Eventually, White took the comment through six drafts. On the next page of this hand-out, you can see his third and sixth drafts. White's main points are underlined. In Draft 6, White gets right to the point. He states the problem he's addressing—"the moon is a poor place for flags"—in his third sentence. In Draft 3, he does not suggest this until the sentence that begins "Yet," and never directly; it is the sum of the large amount of underlined material. Revision enabled White to be clearer by articulating concisely and directly an idea that was earlier implied; correspondingly, revision let him move an idea that was clear by the middle or end of an early draft to the beginning. He also cut his introductory device, the beach trip. The amount of space he devotes to it in draft 3 suggests that White was attached to this example. But it prevents him from getting to the point. So he substitutes the bouncy dance, which preserves the playfulness of the trip to the beach but is more economical.

**Draft 3:**

Planning a trip to the moon differs in no essential respect from planning a trip to the beach. You have to decide what to take along, what to leave behind. Should the thermos jug go? The child's rubber horse? The dill pickles? These are the sometimes fateful decisions on which the success or failure of the whole outing turns. Something goes along that spoils everything because it is always in the way; something gets left behind that is desperately needed for comfort or for safety. The men who drew up the moon list for the astronauts planned long and hard and well. (Should the vacuum cleaner go, to suck up moon dust?) Among the items they sent along, of course, were the little jointed flagpoles and the flag that could be stiffened to the breeze that did not blow. (It is traditional among explorers to plant the flag). Yet the two men who stepped out on the surface of the moon were in a class by themselves and should have been equipped accordingly: they were of the new breed of men, those who had seen the earth whole. When, following instructions, they colored the moon red, white, and blue, they were fumbling with the past – or so it seemed to us, who watched, trembling with awe and admiration and pride. This moon plant was the last scene in the long book of nationalism, one that could have well been omitted. The moon still holds the key to madness, which is universal, still

**Draft 6:**

The moon, it turns out, is a great place for men. One-sixth gravity must be a lot of fun, and when Armstrong and Aldrin went into their bouncy little dance, like two happy children, it was a moment not only of triumph but of gaiety. The moon, on the other hand, is a poor place for flags. Ours looked stiff and awkward, trying to float on the breeze that does not blow. (There must be a lesson here somewhere). It is traditional, of course, for explorers to plant the flag, but it struck us, and we watched with awe and admiration and pride, that our two fellows were universal men, not national men, and should have been equipped accordingly. Like every great river and every great sea, the moon belongs to none and belongs to all. It still holds the key to madness, still controls the tides that lap on shores everywhere, still guards the lovers that kiss in every land under no banner but the sky. What a pity that in our moment of triumph we did not forswear the familiar Iwo Jima scene and plant instead a device acceptable to all: a limp white handkerchief, perhaps, symbol of the common cold, which, like the moon, affects us all, unites us all!
controls the tides that lap on shores everywhere, still guards lovers that kiss in every land under no banner but the sky. What a pity we couldn’t have forsworn our little Iwo Jima scene and planted instead a banner acceptable to all—a simple white handkerchief, perhaps, a symbol of the common cold, which, like the moon, affects us all!

As you revise your own work, keep the following principles in mind:

Revision entails rethinking your thesis. Because clarity of vision is the result of experience, it is unreasonable to expect to come up with the best thesis possible—one that clearly accounts for the complexities of the issue at hand—before beginning a draft, or even during a first draft. The best theses evolve; they are the products of the kind of precise thinking that is only possible to achieve by writing. Successful revision involves bringing your thesis into focus—or, changing it altogether.

Revision entails making structural changes. Drafting is usually a process of discovering an idea or argument. Your argument will not become clearer if you only tinker with individual sentences. Successful revision involves bringing the strongest ideas to the front of the essay, reordering the main points, cutting irrelevant sections, adding implications. It also involves making the argument’s structure visible by strengthening topic sentences and transitions.

Revision takes time. Avoid shortcuts: the reward for sustained effort is a clearer, more persuasive, more sophisticated essay than a first draft can be.

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Anyone who has gone through the ecstasies and agonies of writing an essay knows the satisfaction (and sometimes the sadness) of finishing. Once you've done all the work of figuring out what you want to say, arriving at an arguable and interesting thesis, analyzing your evidence, organizing your ideas, and contending with counter-arguments, you may feel that you've got nothing left to do but run spell-check, print it out and await your professor's response. But what spell-check can't discern is what real readers might think or feel when they read your essay: where they might become confused, or annoyed, or bored, or distracted. Anticipating those responses is the job of an editor—the job you take on as you edit your own work.

As you proceed, remember that sometimes what may seem like a small problem can mask (be a symptom of) a larger one. A poorly-worded phrase—one that seems, say, unclear or vague—may just need some tweaking to fix; but it may indicate that your thinking hasn't developed fully yet, that you're not quite sure what you want to say. Your language may be vague or confusing because the idea itself is. So learning, as Yeats says, to "cast a cold eye" on your prose isn't just a matter of arranging the finishing touches on your essay. It's about making your essay better from the inside (clarifying and deepening your ideas and insights) and from the outside (expressing those ideas in powerful, lucid, graceful prose). These five guidelines can help.

1. **Read your essay aloud.** When we labor over sentences, we can sometimes lose sight of the larger picture, of how all the sentences sound when they're read quickly one after the other, as your readers will read them. When you read aloud, your ear will pick up some of the problems your eye might miss.

   As you read your essay, remember the "The Princess and the Pea," the story of a princess so sensitive she was bothered by a single pea buried beneath the pile of mattresses she lay upon. As an editor, you want to be like the princess—highly alert to anything that seems slightly odd or "off" in your prose. So if something strikes you as problematic, don't gloss over it. Investigate to uncover the nature of the problem. Chances are, if something bothers you a little, it will bother your readers a lot.

2. **Make sure all of your words are doing important work in making your argument.** Are all of your words and phrases necessary? Or are they just taking up space? Are your sentences tight and sharp, or are they loose and dull? Don't say in three sentences what you can say in one, and don't use 14 words where five will do. You want every word in your sentence to add as much meaning and inflection as possible. When you see phrases like "My own personal opinion," ask yourself what "own personal" adds. Isn't that what "my" means?

   Even small, apparently unimportant words like "says" are worth your attention. Instead of "says," could you use a word like argues, acknowledges, contends, believes, reveals, suggests, or claims? Words like these not only make your sentences more lively and interesting, they provide useful information: if you tell your readers that someone "acknowledges" something, that deepens their understanding of how or why he or she said that thing; "said" merely reports.

3. **Keep in mind the concept of le mot juste.** Always try to find the perfect words, the most precise and specific language, to say what you mean. Without using concrete, clear language, you can't convey to your readers exactly what you think about a subject; you can only speak in generalities, and everyone has already heard those: "The evils of society are a drain on our resources." Sentences like this could mean so many things that they end up meaning nothing at all to your readers—or meaning something very different from what you intended. Be specific: What evils? Which societies? What resources? Your readers are reading your words to see what you think, what you have to say.

   If you're having trouble putting your finger on just the right word, consult a thesaurus, but only to remind yourself of your options. Never choose words whose connotations or usual contexts you don't really understand. Using language you're unfamiliar with can lead to more imprecision—and that can lead your reader to question your authority.

4. **Beware of inappropriately elevated language—words and phrases that are stilted, pompous, or jargony.** Sometimes, in an effort to sound more reliable or authoritative, or more sophisticated, we puff up our prose with this sort of language. Usually we only end up sounding like we're trying to sound smart—which is a sure sign to our readers that we're not. If you find yourself inserting words or phrases because you think they'll sound impressive, reconsider. If your ideas are good, you don't need to strain for impressive language; if they're not, that language won't help anyway.

   Inappropriately elevated language can result from nouns being used as verbs. Most parts of speech function better—more elegantly—when they play the roles they were meant to play; nouns work well as nouns and verbs as verbs. Read the following sentences aloud, and listen to how pompous they sound.

   He exited the room. It is important that proponents and opponents of this bill dialogue about its contents before voting on it.
Exits and dialogues work better as nouns; there are plenty of ways of expressing those ideas without turning nouns into verbs.

He left the room. People should debate the pros and cons of this bill before voting.

Every now and then, though, this is a rule worth breaking, as in "He muscled his way to the front of the line." "Muscled" gives us a lot of information that might otherwise take several words or even sentences to express. And because it's not awkward to read, but lively and descriptive, readers won't mind the temporary shift in roles as "muscled" becomes a verb.

5. Be tough on your most dazzling sentences. As you revise, you may find that sentences you needed in earlier drafts no longer belong—and these may be the sentences you’re most fond of. We’re all guilty of trying to sneak in our favorite sentences where they don't belong, because we can't bear to cut them. But great writers are ruthless and will throw out brilliant lines if they're no longer relevant or necessary. They know that readers will be less struck by the brilliance than by the inappropriateness of those sentences and they let them go.

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Editing the Essay, Part Two

When you read writing you like, ask yourself: How did the writer do that? How did the writer make me see this image, feel this feeling? Try to figure out how the writer achieves those effects, and then try some of those moves on your own. Don't feel guilty about this; all great writers are great readers. In finding a new way to say something, we're always building on what came before, adding our voices to an ongoing conversation. Here are more ways to help you add yours.

1. Try to avoid repetitive sentence structure. Try to vary the rhythm in your sentences. Try to avoid starting all your sentences the same way. Try to write sentences of differing lengths. (The structure and the length of the preceding sentences make this choppy and dull to read, and readers get so distracted by the monotony of the sound, that they lose focus on the sense of what you're saying.)

2. A word to the wise: watch out for cliches. Phrases that we hear all the time have lost their impact and vividness, and you want your readers to feel that they're hearing a fresh voice when they read your essay. Of course, avoiding cliches altogether is easier said than done. Sometimes a cliché is just what you need to make a point, and trying to avoid them at all costs can make your prose seem strained and unnatural. You don't want your prose to be so demanding that your readers can't see the forest for the trees. So get in the habit of questioning phrases that come to you especially easily to determine whether they might be stale, whether there might be more powerful ways of expressing your idea. When you use a cliché, do it intentionally, and don't do it too often. This is just the tip of the iceberg on this subject, but let's not push the envelope.

3. Be sparing in your use of rhetorical or stylistic flourishes—cutesy touches like alliteration, double entendres, or extended metaphors. A well-placed sentence fragment or a sentence beginning with "And" or "But" or "Or" can emphasize a point well. But too much of this sort of thing and you'll sound shrill. Or dull. It's okay to wink at your reader every now and then, if that's appropriate to your essay's tone, but try to avoid spending so much time winking that you never seem to have your eyes open. (See, that's a little cutesy, but at least it's not an example of #4.)

4. Beware of mixed metaphors. While metaphors can help make abstract ideas more vivid and concrete for your readers, piling them one on top of the other can be confusing. Consider: "The fabric of society vibrates to the fluctuations of the stock market." There are too many metaphors here competing for your readers' attention. Does it really make sense, anyway, to say that fabric vibrates? It's usually better to pick one image and stick with it. So if you want to use a metaphor like "fabric of society," choose language that's appropriate for talking about fabric: "The fabric of society is more delicate than it sometimes seems."

5. Don't use "crutches" to support weak, imprecise language. Phrases like "It is almost impossible to extricate..." or "The writer's almost magical ability to transform..." use "almost" as a crutch. Either it's "impossible" or it's not, "magical" or not. If it is impossible, or if you're claiming it's so, be bold and say it! Take responsibility for your claim by being direct about it; don't hide behind an "almost." If it's not impossible, be clear about what it is. Tough? Very difficult?

6. Don't call something a fact that isn't one, even if it may be true. "The fact that Shakespeare is a great writer ..." That's not a fact, even though most people agree that he's pretty good. "The fact that water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit ..." That's a fact. Similarly, don't call something unprecedented if you just mean to say it's rare or surprising. Unprecedented means something specific and literal. (Of course, all words have literal meanings, but not all of them need to be used equally literally. Many can be bent, and stretched, and played around with. But be careful when you're using words, like "fact," whose very natures require
7. "But"—only use it if you really mean it; that is, if you're introducing a counter-argument or contradiction. Otherwise, your readers will wonder what you're "but-ing" against. You lose credibility if you seem to be trying to create high drama or conflict or suggesting counter-argument where there really isn't any. Needless to say, this also goes for "however." (And why is "Needless to say" necessary? If it really is needless to say what you're saying, why are you saying it?)

8. Try not to overuse forms of the verb "to be." Replace some of those "are"s and "were"s with words that add more energy to your sentences. Instead of saying "Jones's theory is a direct contradiction of Smith's" say "Jones's theory contradicts Smith's." Instead of "This historian is outspoken about revisionist theories," try "This historian speaks out against ...."

9. Avoid sexist language. A sure way to lose your readers is to make them feel that you're not speaking to them, that your essay hasn't been written with them in mind. Using sexist language, even if you don't mean to offend, is certain to alienate people. Wherever you use phrases like "Throughout history, man has ..." figure out how to make it gender-neutral, or how to include women in your world-view. Here, for instance, you could say: "humans" or "we" or "people" or "men and women."

When you refer to someone who has no specific gender ("The last line confuses the reader..."), how should you follow that up? If you say "he," referring to "the reader," you're excluding the possibility that the reader is female. There's no perfect solution to this problem, as our language is still evolving to accommodate issues like these, but there are things you can do. Occasionally, you can use "he or she." Don't repeat that too many times, though. It gets irritating quickly. You can switch from "he" to "she" a few times throughout your essay, but don't do it within one specific example, or your reader will become confused. Whenever possible, use plurals to avoid the problem: "Readers may be confused when they get to the last line" is a neat way of side-stepping the issue. And don't let your attempts to avoid sexist language lead you into ungrammatical phrasing: "One should always edit their essay." You need to be mindful of sexist language and the elegance of your prose, not one or the other.

10. Make sure you're not over-quotting. Try to quote only the most essential, illustrative, or vividly-phrased material. Too much quoting obscures your own thinking, while highlighting that of your source. It suggests to your reader that you're leaning heavily on your source because you don't have much to say for yourself, or that you couldn't be bothered, or didn't take the time, to summarize. Remember that your readers are trying to figure out what you think. If they only wanted to hear your sources' positions, they'd go read them.

Remember, too, that unless you're reasonably sure your sources are known to most readers (Plato or Joan of Arc or Freud, for example), you need to introduce them in some way. Even a brief mention of a source's field or area of expertise can help orient your reader: "as philosopher Robert Nozick says, ..."

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Plot

The Nature of Fiction: As a descriptive term, “fiction” is misleading; although fiction does often include made-up or imaginary elements, it has the potential for being true: true to the nature of reality, true to human experience. (C.S. Lewis called it “true myth.”) Both writers of history and of fiction attempt to create a world that resembles the multiplicity and complexity of the real world. What makes fiction different, of course, is its ability to build conflict, to be imaginative, to order events, and to be dramatic. Writers of fiction celebrate their separateness, distinctness, and importance of all individuals and all individual differences. They assume that human experiences, whatever they are, and whenever they occur, are intrinsically important and interesting. Additionally, writers of fiction see reality as welded to psychological perception, as refracted through the minds of individuals.

Writers arrange fictional events into patterns (plot). (Review Freytag's Pyramid). See also Chapter 2 of the Perrine’s Literature text for more on plot.

Probably the most revealing question you can ask about a work is:

What conflicts does it dramatize?

You can break it down into sub-questions, each of which might produce interesting ideas:

What is the main conflict? What are the minor conflicts?

How are the conflicts related?

What are their causes?

Which conflicts are external and which are internal?

Who is the protagonist? The antagonist?

What qualities or values does the author associate with each side of the conflict?

Where does the climax occur? Why? (Climax: the time when the protagonist has all the information he needs to act).

How is the main conflict resolved? The minor ones? Which go unresolved (what is unsaid, undone), and why?

Additional strategies for thinking about plot:

1. List the qualities of the protagonist(s) and the antagonist(s).
2. On one side of a piece of paper, list the external conflicts of the work. On the other side, list the internal conflicts. Draw a line between the related conflicts.
3. List the key conflicts. For each conflict, list the ways in which the conflict has been resolved, if it has. Mark the conflicts that are left unresolved, along with your suppositions as to why they go unresolved.
4. List the major structural units of the work (chapters, scenes, parts). Summarize what happens in each part. What relationship do the action or conflicts have to the structure?
5. Are certain episodes narrated out of chronological order? What is the effect of the arrangements of episodes?
6. Are certain situations repeated? If so, what do you make of the repetitions?
7. Describe the qualities that make the situation at the beginning unstable. Describe the qualities that make the conclusion stable, if in fact it is stable. If it remains unstable, describe why it is so.
8. List the causes of the unstable situations at the beginning and throughout the work.
Narrative Pace

Every story is told at a certain pace with some variations in speed. In stories in which the unfolding of quick or violent action is important, the narrator may use action verbs rather than verbs of being or condition to create the effect of headlong speed in a chase or quick, reciprocal action in a fistfight. However, in novels of ideas or of manners, there may be well-extended discussions of ideas by the characters or by the narrator. In such a case, very little action may take place and the narrative pace may substantially slow down.

When a prompt asks you to consider a writer’s narrative pace, consider:

1. How the writer holds our attention
2. How suspense and/or excitement is produced (how (s)he moves the plot forward)
3. The cause/effect nature of storytelling (paying attention to exposition – conflict – denouement)
4. How the story is told in time
5. Variations in amount of outward and inward knowledge involved
6. How the point of view helps emphasize the narrator’s development from innocence to awareness
7. How the writer uses verbs and pronoun person in establishing connections
8. Whether the narrative flow is interrupted (perhaps by dialogue, digression, etc.
9. A vocabulary for discussing “narrative pace” in a literary piece might be similar to one discussing music (tempo, cadence, staccato, emotional pitch, dynamic, etc.).
Setting

Setting includes several closely related aspects of a work of fiction. First, setting is the physical, sensuous world of the work. Second, it’s the time in which the action of the work takes place. Third, it’s the social environment of the characters: the manners, customs, and moral values that govern the characters’ society. A fourth aspect, atmosphere, is largely but not entirely an effect of setting.

Issues to consider when thinking about the setting of a work:

Questions about the place: You should get the details of the physical setting clear in your mind. Where does the action take place? On what planet, in what country or locale? What sensuous qualities does the author give to the setting? That is, what does it look like, sound like, smell like, feel like? Do you receive a dominant impression about the setting? If so, what impression, and what caused it? Once you establish the above, what relationship does the place have to characterization and theme? In what ways does the physical or external setting correspond to or contrast with the psychological or internal landscape? Geographic location may be of importance.

Questions about time: Three kinds of time occur in fiction. First, at what period in history does the action take place? Many stories occur during historical events that affect the characters and themes in important ways. Second, how long does it take for the action to occur? How does the author use the passage of time as a thematic and structuring device? Third, how is the passage of time perceived? Time may seem to move very slowly or very quickly, depending on a character’s state of mind. Thus our recognition of a character’s perception of time helps us understand the character’s internal conflicts and attitudes.

Questions about atmosphere: Atmosphere refers to the emotional reaction that we (and usually the characters) have to the setting of the work. Sometimes the atmosphere is difficult to define, but it is often found or felt in the sensuous quality of the setting.

Additional strategies for analyzing setting:

1. Mark the most extensive or important descriptions of physical place. Underline the most telling words and phrases.
2. Characterize physical locales, such as houses, rooms, and outdoor areas.
3. Explain the relationship of one or more of the main characters to the physical place. Explain the influence that place exerts on the characters.
4. Arrange the main events in chronological order. Indicate when each major event occurs.
5. Mark passages where a character’s emotional state affects the way the passage of time is presented.
6. List the historical, factual, and circumstantial aspects of the work. Explain their importance and their relationship to themes and characters in the book.
7. List the patterns of behavior that characterize the social environment of the work.
8. Mark the scenes in which the author or characters express approval or disapproval of these patterns of behavior.
9. Explain the influence one or more of these patterns have on a character or characters.
10. Mark sections that contribute to atmosphere. Underline key words and phrases.
11. List the traits of the atmosphere.
Character

Authors reveal what characters are like in two general ways: directly or indirectly. In the direct method, the author simply tells the reader what the characters are like. When the method of revealing characters is indirect, however, the author shows us (rather than tells us) what the characters are like through what they say about one another, through external details (dress, bearing, appearance), and through their thoughts, actions, and speech.

Characters who remain the same throughout the work are called static, whereas those who change through the course of the work are called dynamic. Dynamic characters typically grow in understanding. The climax of this growth is called an epiphany, a term Irish writer James Joyce used to describe a sudden revelation of truth experienced by a character. The term comes from the Bible and describes the wise men’s first perception of Christ’s divinity.

Read Chapter 3 of the Perrine’s Literature text for much more on character.

You can ask many revealing questions about characters and the ways they are developed:

1. Are they static or dynamic? What drives the stasis or growth of each?
2. How is this stasis or growth manifested?
3. Describe recognizable stereo- or archetypal characters (hero, villain, temptress, evil genius, etc.).
4. Describe speech patterns, mannerisms, or other outward manifestations of the hidden self of each character.
5. Describe conflicts the characters suffer from (man vs. man, man vs. himself, man vs. society, man vs. nature, etc.), whether they are internal or external, and how those characters are affected by conflict.
6. Describe particular epiphanies that have led a character to change.
7. How does what they learn help or hinder them?
8. How do their problems help or hinder them? Do they attempt to solve their problems?
9. Describe what creates complexity for them (personal baggage, culture, etc.).
10. Describe their contradictory traits and emotional states, and how those personality features create or solve problems for each character.
11. How do characters relate to or affect one another?
12. How do characters affect the forward motion and outcome of the plot (and vice versa)?
Style

Analysis of style is not valuable without connecting that analysis to the meaning of the work. The way that an author chooses words, and puts together sentences and paragraphs, is not accidental – nor should elements of style be considered in isolation.

Broad questions for looking at style:

  How does the content of the work dictate its form?
  How does the writer’s syntax, language, imagery, diction, and included or omitted detail contribute to your understanding of plot, theme, character, and setting?

Questions for the analysis of style in prose passages:

1. What is the narrator’s attitude toward the scene or event being described? How do you know? And what reasons for this attitude become clear?
2. Describe the tone. Is there any bitterness, sarcasm, or irony? How do you know? Describe sources for these textual features.
3. If setting is emphasized, what contributes to the mood of the setting?
4. If there are characters described in the piece, what is their relationship to one another?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the setting and the characters? If so, what is it, and how is it revealed?
6. Examine the diction. Describe word choices that particularly enhance the mood or reveal the narrator’s attitude.
7. Examine the verbs used in the passage. Do they connote activity or stasis? What tense is the passage written in, and how does tense contribute to the overall meaning?
8. Examine the syntax. How does it contribute to the overall effect?
9. Examine how the writer describes things. Are the words and phrases elaborate, complex, or simple?
10. Is figurative language used, such as simile, metaphor, hyperbole, allusion, or personification? What is their significance? What is their relationship to the piece as a whole?
11. Are any sensory images evoked?
12. Describe the writer’s use of contrast or comparison and its significance.
13. Describe repeated words, phrases, images, or sentence structures and the purpose and effect of that repetition.
14. Describe the organization of the piece, including any repeated structural elements and paragraph relationships to one another and to the work as a whole.
15. Describe the theme of the piece, including how separate elements come together to build the thematic message.
16. Characterize the writer’s style and describe how that style contributes to and complements the content of the piece.

Remember to specifically refer to the text to support your points, and that all these points are actually captured in your thesis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Textual Ex.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Segregating</td>
<td>Grammatically simple, expressing a single idea. Relatively short and uncomplicated.</td>
<td>He writes, at most, 750 words a day. He writes and rewrites. He polishes and re-polishes. He works in solitude. He works with agony. He works with sweat. And that is the only way to work at all.</td>
<td>Useful in descriptive and narrative writing. Analyzes a complicated perception or action into its parts and arranges these in significant order. Simple yet effective. Emphatic. Adds variety.</td>
<td>Less useful in exposition where a writer must combine ideas in subtle gradations of logic and importance. Can also become too simplistic and lose character.</td>
<td>Dialogue. Narrative passages to show abruptness or strong feeling. Emphasis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freight Train</td>
<td>Couples short, independent clauses to make longer, sequential statements.</td>
<td>And the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house, and it fell: and great was the fall of it.</td>
<td>Can link a series of events, ideas, impressions, feelings, or perceptions as immediately as possible, without judging their relative value or imposing a logical structure upon them.</td>
<td>Does not handle ideas subtly, and implies that all linked thoughts are equally significant. Cannot show precise logical relationships (cause and effect). Can continue without stopping.</td>
<td>Children’s writing or childlike visions. Experience of the mind. “Stream of consciousness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Coordination</td>
<td>using “and” to link coordinating clauses</td>
<td>MC: It was a hot day and the sky was bright and the road was white and dusty.</td>
<td>Enriches meaning by emphasizing subtle connections between ideas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parataxis</td>
<td>independent clauses linked by semicolons</td>
<td>Parataxis: The habits of the natives were disgusting; the women hawk on the floor, the forks are dirty; the Pont Neuf is not a patch on the London Bridge; the cows are too skinny.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triadic Sentence</td>
<td>3 clauses using MC or Parataxis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cumulative Sentence</td>
<td>Initial independent clause followed by many subordinate conjunctions; accumulates details about the person, place, event, or idea</td>
<td>A creek ran through the meadow, winding and turning, clear water running between steep banks of black earth, with shallow places where you build a dam. She was then twenty-one, a year out of Smith College, a dark, shy, quiet girl with a fine mind and a small but pure gift...</td>
<td>Can handle a series of events. Can act as a frame, enclosing the details. Details may precede or follow the main clause – using “these,” “those,” “this,” “that,” and “such” as preceding nouns.</td>
<td>Open-ended (like a freight train sentence)</td>
<td>Description, character sketches. Less often used in narration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Parallel Style</td>
<td>Two or more words or constructions stand in an identical grammatical relationship to the same thing. All subjects must be in the same form.</td>
<td>In its energy, its lyric, its advocacy of frustrated joys, rock is one long symphony of protest.</td>
<td>Impressive and pleasing to hear. Economical – using one element to serve three or four others. Enriches meaning by emphasizing subtle connections between words.</td>
<td>Suits only ideas that are logically parallel – three or four conditions of the same effect. Is formal for modern tastes. Can be too wordy just by being a parallel structure.</td>
<td>Can be used in all forms of writing for emphasis or description – emotional or intellectual.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Balanced Sentence

Two parts, roughly equivalent in length. It may also be split on either side.

- *In a few moments everything grew black, and the rain poured down like a cataract.*
- *Visit either you like; they're both mad.*
- *Children played about her, and she sang as she worked.*

The constructions may be balanced and parallel.

Unsuitable for conveying the immediacy of raw experience or the intensity of strong emotion.

Formality is likely to seem too elaborate for modern readers.

Irony and comedy (and just about anything else)

## The Subordinating Style

Expresses the main clause and arranges points of lesser importance around it in the form of phrases and independent clauses.

- **Loose structure:** main clause comes first.
- **Periodic structure:** main clause follows subordinate parts.
- **Convoluted structure:** main clause is split in two; subordinate clauses are what make the division.
- **Centered structure:** main clause occupied the middle of the sentence.

## The Fragment

Single word, phrase, or dependent clause standing alone as a sentence.

- *Remove the cold and stupid eyeball, it would bleat still, “Ahhhh,” take off the head, shake out the sawdust, crack the back against the brass bed rail, it would bleat still. The gauge back would slit, and I could see the disk with secret holes, the secret of the sound. A mere metal roundness.*

Emphasis.

Unsupported fragments become grammatical errors — fixed by rejoining the modifier with the sentence.

Only used occasionally.

Formal and informal writing – for emphasis.
Point of View

Participant or First Person Point of View
The participant point of view is also called first person point of view because first person pronouns (I, me, my, we, us, our) are used to tell the story. The participant point of view can be further subdivided into two types:

- The narrator as a major character (the story is told by and is chiefly about the narrator).
- The narrator as a minor character (the narrator tells a story that focuses on someone else, but the narrator is still a character in the story).

A special type of participant narrator is called the unreliable, or innocent-eye, narrator. The character telling the story may be a child or a developmentally disabled individual (such as Benjy in The Sound and the Fury); the narrator is thus naïve. The contrast between what the innocent-eye narrator perceives and what the reader understands may produce an ironic effect. The subjective or distorted nature of the storytelling may also be intentional on the part of the character.

Stream-of-consciousness (interior monologue) is a narrative method in modern fiction in which the author tells the story through an unbroken flow of thought and awareness (James Joyce and William Faulkner are famous for employing this point of view). The technique attempts to capture exactly what is going on in the mind of the character.

Another special type of first person or participant narrator involves different times in a character’s life (e.g. Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird or David in David Copperfield).

Purposes of the Participant or First-Person Point of View
The first-person point of view offers immediacy. The reader sees what the individual perceives “I.” The first-person narrator can:

- Approach other fictional characters as closely as one human being can approach another.
- Be an eyewitness, observing what other characters say and do.
- Summarize events and retreat from a scene to meditate on its significance.

Nonparticipant or Third-Person Point of View
The nonparticipant point of view is also called third-person point of view because the third person pronouns (he, him, she, her, they, them) are used to tell the story.

The nonparticipant point of view can be subdivided into three types:

- Omniscient narrator: the author can enter the minds of all the characters.
- Selective (limited) omniscient narrator: the author limits his/her omniscience to the minds of a few of the characters or to the mind of a single character.
- Objective narrator: the author does not enter a single mind but instead records what can be seen and heard. This type of narrator is like a camera or a fly on the wall.

A rarely used point of view in literature is second person point of view. This narrative technique uses second person pronouns (you, your, yourself, etc). Use of the second person point of view is uncommon because it directly involves the reader in the story, and the reader may be unwilling or unable to identify with the “you” in the story. (Choose your Own Adventures are written in second person, actively involving the audience).
James Moffet’s Eleven Points of View

On a continuum from Subjectivity to Objectivity:

Subjectivity
- Interior Monologue
- Dramatic Monologue
- Letter (Epistolary) Narration
- Diary Narration
- Subjective Narration
- Detached Autobiography
- Memoir or Observer Narration
- Biography or Anonymous Narration
- Anonymous Narration/Dual Character Point of View
- Anonymous Narration/Multiple Character Point of View
- Anonymous Narration/No Character Point of View

Objectivity
Theme

The key questions for eliciting a work’s theme(s) are:

What is the subject?  (What is the work about?)
Next, what is the theme?  (What does the work say about the subject?)
Finally, in what direct and indirect ways does the work communicate the theme(s)?

One strategy for discovering a work’s theme(s) is to apply frequently asked questions about areas of human experience, such as the following:

Human nature: What images of humankind emerge from the work?  Are people, for example, generally good?  Deeply flawed?

The nature of society: Does the author portray a particular society or social scheme as life-enhancing or life-destroying?  Are characters we care about in conflict with their society?  If so, in what ways do they conflict with that society?  Do these characters want to escape from it?  What causes and perpetuates this society?  If the society is flawed, how is it flawed?

Human freedom: What control do characters have over their own lives?  Do they make choices in complete freedom?  Are they driven by forces beyond their control (FBOC)?  Does Providence or fate or the will of God or some other grand scheme govern history, or is history merely random and arbitrary?

Ethics: What are the moral conflicts in the work?  Are they clear cut or ambiguous?  (Is it clear to us what is right and what exactly is wrong?)  When moral conflicts are ambiguous in a work, right often opposes right, not wrong.  (Don’t forget to examine these issues from the perspective of every character.)  What rights are in opposition to one another?  If right opposes wrong, does right win in the end?  To what extent are characters to blame for their actions?

Another strategy for discovering a work’s theme(s) is to answer this question:
Who serves as the moral center of the work?  The moral center is the one person whom the author vests with right thought and action (or, at least, what the author thinks is the right thought and action) – the one character who seems clearly good and who often serves to judge the other characters.

Additional strategies to aid in the development of a thematic statement:

1. List the subject or subjects of a work.  For each subject, see if you can state a theme in a complete sentence.  Put a check next to the ones that seem most appropriate.
2. Explain how the title, subtitle, epigraph, chapter, titles, and names of characters may be related to theme.
3. Describe the work’s depiction of human behavior.
4. Describe the work’s depiction of society.  Explain the representation of social ills and how they might be addressed and possibly corrected.
5. List the moral issues raised in the work.
6. Name the character who is the moral center of the work.  List his or her traits that support your choices.
7. Mark statements by the author or characters that seem to imply or state themes.
8. Does the theme(s) of the work reinforce or challenge values you hold?
Irony came into the English language in the 16th century from the Latin *ironia*, which came from the Greek *eironia* ("feigned ignorance"), which came from the Greek *eiron* (the one who makes a question pretending to be naïve), which came from the Greek *eirein* (to speak) [www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/irony]. Socrates was the original here: in a method we now refer to as Socratic irony (this is where feigned ignorance comes into play), the questioner makes inquiries that may seem foolish or ignorant to move a debate in the direction he or she wants.

Irony is a device that uses language to express both a surface meaning and a different underlying meaning. Below you will find a list of types of irony; there is some overlap between categories, but you will get a sense of the many possible ironic situations.

**Verbal irony (sometimes called rhetorical irony)** is simplest. We use this often. This is a difference between what is said and what is meant, understood from context or tone. You use verbal irony when your friend dribbles catsup down the front of her shirt and you compliment her on the improvement to her outfit.

**Situational irony** is when characters and/or the audience expect one outcome but get the opposite, a discrepancy between the expected and the actual. In the Edgar Lee Masters poem “Richard Cory,”, the main character seems to have a perfect life – which he ends himself.

**Dramatic irony** is when the audience knows more about the characters’ fates than they do themselves; their speech/actions mean one thing to them but another thing to the audience/reader. Oedipus is the classic example; the audience knows that, in seeking the murderer he seeks himself. It can also be, however, that the audience knows that things will turn out well but the characters are not yet aware of this fact.

**Structural irony** is when a double level of meaning is continued throughout a work by means of some inherent feature such as a hero, narrator, or persona who is either naïve or fallible (a participant in the story whose judgment is impaired by prejudice, personal interests, or limited knowledge [web.uvic.ca/wguide/pages/ltirony.html]). This double meaning can undermine the work. The gullible Gulliver of Gulliver's Travels tries to behave like a horse, convinced that horses are better than men.

**Irony of fate (or cosmic irony)** is the “irony that exists between a character’s aspirations and the treatment he or she receives at the hands of fate.” It is “[a] type of situational irony that can be used for either tragic or comic purposes. Irony of fate is the discrepancy between actions and their results, between what characters deserve and what they get, between appearance and reality. In Sophocles’s tragedy, for instance, Oedipus unwittingly fulfills the prophecy even as he takes the actions a morally good man would take to avoid it” (Kennedy and Gioia. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. 9th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.) This type of irony has God, miscellaneous gods, fate, Providence, or what have you having his/her/its/their way with a character, despite that character’s efforts. And it is most often a bad thing.
Satire

Satire defined:

Satire performs a special function of analysis that is conducted through an attack on an individual, a type of individual, an attitude or idea, an institution, a genre, or an event. Its attack is intended to expose weakness, follies, or vices, but it does not necessarily aim at mending them. The satiric attack is usually indirect and its central tool is irony. Except in the specialized form of classical satire known as Juvenalian Satire, the attack employs wit or humor as a central device.

The Satirist:

Although the satirist may not profess to be a moralist (and, in fact, may be thought by his society to be immoral, as in the case of Lord Byron), he usually has a strong sense of personal morality and ethics, in the light of which he judges the individuals, attitudes, institutions, and events around him. He often appears to be a loner. Sometimes the satirist's moral and ethical sense is the same as that of society, in which case he tends to attack the norms themselves. In the former case we have Jonathan Swift writing *Gulliver's Travels*, and in the latter case we have Joseph Heller writing *Catch-22*.

When the satirist draws a self-portrait or creates a mouthpiece for his own view, he generally likes to portray himself as one or more of the following:

1. The plain-speaking, moral man or woman – the good (wo)man of plain living, high thinking, lasting friendships, and altruistic impulses
2. The ingénue or naïf who is simple at heart and professes not to understand the very ironies (s)he conveys – because he is innocent and good, he is usually shocked at wickedness and is easily duped
3. The hero who attacks evil verbally and/or physically and is willing to sacrifice him/herself for his or her moral cause

Satiric Devices

1. Humor
   A. exaggeration: the formalized walk of Charlie Chaplin (of silent movie fame), the facial and body contortions of Jim Carrey
   B. understatement: Fielding's description of a grossly fat and repulsively ugly Mrs. Slipslop: “She was not remarkably handsome.”
   C. incongruity
   D. deflation: the English professor mispronounces a word, the President slips and bangs his head leaving the helicopter, etc.
   E. linguistic games: malapropisms, weird rhymes, etc.
   F. surprise: twist endings, unexpected events
2. Irony (see that handout)
3. Invective: name calling, general slander
4. Mock Encomium: praise which is only apparent and which suggests blame instead
5. Grotesque: creating a tension between laughter and horror or revulsion; the essence of all sick or “black” humor
6. Comic Juxtaposition: linking together with no commentary items which normally do not go together; Pope's line in *The Rape of the Lock*: “Puffs, patches, bibles, and billet-doux”
7. Mock Epic/Mock Heroic: using elevated diction and devices from the epic or the heroic to deal with low or trivial subjects
8. Parody: mimicking the style and/or techniques of something or someone else
9. Inflation: taking a real-life situation and blowing it out of proportion to make it ridiculous and showcase its faults
10 Diminution: taking a real-life situation and reducing it to make it ridiculous and showcase its faults

Some literary satirists:

Some visual satires:

(Ideas collected from Professor John Stoler, Harmon & Holman’s A Handbook to Literature, Gretchen Polnac, and other teachers and students).
Terms Associated with Close Reading

(Definitions contain examples from *Jane Eyre* and *Antigone*, and an explanation of how the use of the device links to meaning.)

**Literary Elements**

*Archetype* is a character, action, or situation that is a prototype or pattern of human life generally; a situation that occurs over and over again in literature, such as a quest, an initiation, or an attempt to overcome evil. Many *myths* are archetypes. Two common types of archetypes are *setting* and *character*. A common archetypal setting is the desert, which is associated with spiritual sterility and barrenness because it is devoid of many amenities and personal comforts. *Archetypal characters* are those who embody a certain kind of universal human experience. For example, a *femme fatale*, *siren*, or *temptress* figure is a character that purposefully lures men to disaster through her beauty. Other examples of archetypal figures include the “damsel in distress,” the “mentor,” the “old crone,” “hag,” or witch, and the “naïve young man from the country.” These characters are recognizable human “types” and their stories recreate “typical” or recurrent human experiences. *Jane Eyre’s* journey is a *heroic journey*. She begins life as a lowly orphan, mistreated by her guardian. By challenging her unfair treatment, she finds herself sent away to school and into the world. She travels through life, tested, tempted, and abandoned. In utter despair, she survives by remaining true to her convictions. Her ultimate reward is a strong (legal) marriage to Rochester in which she is an equal partner.

*Characters* are people or animals who take part in the action of a literary work. Readers learn about characters from:

- What they say (*dialogue*),
- What they do (*actions*),
- What they think (*interior monologue*),
- What others say about them, and
- Through the author’s direct statement.

The character with whom readers identify is almost always the *protagonist*, the adversary of this character is then the *antagonist*. To be believable, a character must reflect universal human characteristics that are the same despite geographical differences and time periods. The emotions and concerns of real people of all times are expressed in concrete terms through the traits of literary characters. An author may choose to emphasize a single important trait, creating what is called a *flat character*, or the author may present a complex, fully rounded personality (a three-dimensional or *round character*). A character that changes little over the course of a narrative is called a *static character*. Things happen to these characters, but little happens *in* them. A character that changes in response to the actions through which he or she passes is called a *dynamic character*. *Epiphany* is an unfolding in which a character proceeds from ignorance and innocence to knowledge and experience. One of the objectives of the work is to reveal the consequences of the action upon her or him.
The **protagonist** of *Jane Eyre* is Jane herself because it is her story, and she is always central to the action. She is **dynamic** because she changes and adjusts to new circumstances throughout her journey.

Jane Eyre's chief **antagonist** is Rochester because he tries to make her into something that she is not, as does St. John later in the story.

A **flat, static character** in *Jane Eyre* is the spiteful Aunt Reed who never changes in her attitude towards Jane, not even on her deathbed.

**Motivation** (the reason for a character's behavior)—Jane's motivation is self-preservation and trying to find a measure of happiness in a world of dreary prospects for an orphan girl with no money.

**Epiphany**—For example, Jane Eyre suddenly understands all the mysterious events and signs when she hears Mr. Briggs announce that Mr. Rochester has a wife still living. Everything makes sense to her now.

**Foil**—a character, usually minor, designed to highlight qualities of a major character; e.g., Blanche Ingram enhances Jane's qualities of modesty and humility.

**Stock**—a flat character in a standard role with standard traits: e.g., Mrs. Reed is like a wicked stepmother, and her children act as wicked stepsisters and brother.

**Details** are the facts revealed by the author or speaker that support the attitude or tone in a piece of poetry or prose: e.g., in *Jane Eyre* Rochester explains the arrangements he made for housing his "mad" wife:

> "I had some trouble in finding an attendant for her: as it was necessary to select one on whose fidelity dependence could be placed; for her ravings would inevitably betray my secret; besides, she had lucid intervals of days—sometimes weeks—which she filled up with abuse of me. At last I hired Grace Poole, from the Grimsby Retreat. She and the surgeon, Carter..., are the only two I have ever admitted to my confidence. Mrs. Fairfax may indeed have suspected something; but she could have gained no precise knowledge as to facts." (272)

Rochester seems to have made the best arrangements he possible could have made for Bertha, but he also wants to keep her hidden away. Since she has periods of sanity, she might reveal her identity if others interacted with her.

**Diction** is word choice intended to convey a certain effect: e.g., in *Jane Eyre* Bronte describes Bertha in harsh terms:

> In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it **groveled**, seemingly, on all fours; it **snatched** and **growled** like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of **dark, grizzled hair**, wild as a **mane**, hid its head and face. (257-258)

Words such as **groveled, snatched, mane** make Bertha appear as something less than human.
The *denotative* and *connotative* meanings of words must also be considered. *Denotation* refers to the dictionary definition of a word, whereas *connotation* refers to the feelings and attitudes associated with a word. Here is an example from *Jane Eyre*: "And, Miss Eyre, so much was I flattered by this preference of the Gallic sylph for her British gnome, that I installed her in an hotel..." (123).

In this sentence, the author Charlotte Bronte emphasizes the contrast between Rochester and Celine Varens, the French opera singer, by having him call Celine a sylph—"(1) any of a class of imaginary beings supposed to inhabit the air. (2) a slender, graceful woman or girl." And he calls himself a gnome—"in folklore, a dwarf supposed to dwell in the earth and guard its treasures." (Definitions from Webster's)

The connotations of these two words reinforce even more the differences between Celine and Rochester. *Sylph* suggests beauty, delicateness, happiness, lightness, while *gnome* suggests ugliness, heaviness, despair, darkness—or day and night. Neither sylphs nor gnomes exist, Bronte perhaps suggesting through these words that neither does their relationship. Rochester discovers later that Celine was only using him.

*Dialect* is the speech of a particular region or group as it differs from those of a real or imaginary standard speech. For example, John and Mary, the servants at Ferndean, speak in a lower-class dialect to distinguish their position in society. After Jane and Rochester marry, Jane hears John say, "'She'll happen do better for him nor any o' t' grand ladies.' And, 'If she ben't one o' the handsomest, she's noan faal and vary good-natured; and i' his een she's fair beautiful, anybody may see that'" (395). (Translation: "She will be better for him than any of the grand ladies.") And, "'If she isn't one of the handsomest, she's no fool and very good-natured; and in his eyes she's quite beautiful, anybody may see that'."

*Euphemism* is the use of a word or phrase that is less expressive or direct but considered less distasteful or offensive than another; e.g., when Helen Burns is dying of tuberculosis, the doctor says, "she'll not be here long" (69). Then Jane visits Helen and asks her, "Are you going somewhere, Helen? Are you going home?" And Helen replies, "Yes; to my long home—my lasting home" (70). These phrases (*not be here long* and *long/last home*) soften the blow of Helen's dying.

*Idiom* is an accepted phrase or expression having a meaning different from the literal: e.g., when Abbot and Bessie take Jane to lock her in the red room, she says, "The fact is, I was a trifle beside myself; or rather out of myself, as the French would say" (9). Both phrases are idioms because it is physically impossible to be next to oneself or outside of oneself. She means she is thinking and behaving in a way she has not before.

*Imagery* consists of the words or phrases a writer uses to represent persons, objects, actions, feelings, and ideas descriptively by appealing to the senses: e.g., in *Jane Eyre* Jane describes one of her paintings that caught Rochester's attention with its vivid images:

One gleam of light lifted into relief a half-submerged mast, on which sat a cormorant, dark and large, with wings flecked with foam; its beak held a gold bracelet, set with gems, that I had touched with as brilliant tints as my palette could yield, and as glittering distinctness as my pencil could impart. Sinking below the bird and mast, a drowned
corpse glanced through the green water; a fair arm was the only limb clearly visible, whence the bracelet had been washed or torn. (110)

Not only do the images set an eerie mood; they also foreshadow disastrous events in Jane’s relationship with Rochester.

_Mood_ is the atmosphere or predominant emotion in a literary work: e.g., in _Jane Eyre_ the atmosphere of Moor House beckons to a miserable, destitute Jane:

I could see clearly a room with a sanded floor, clean scoured; a dresser of walnut, with pewter plates ranged in rows, reflecting the redness and radiance of a glowing peat-fire. I could see a clock, a white deal table, some chairs. The candle, whose ray had been my beacon, burnt on the table; and by its light an elderly woman, somewhat rough-looking, but scrupulously clean, like all about, was knitting a stocking. (292)

Nothing could appeal to Jane more at this point than a clean, warm home. The occupants take her in and nurse her back to health and help her achieve a measure of independence.

_Plot_ is the sequence of events or actions in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem. _Freytag’s Pyramid_ is a convenient diagram that describes the typical pattern of a dramatic or fictional work. The structure of the work begins with _exposition_, in which the author lays the groundwork for the reader by revealing the setting, the relationships between the characters, and the situation, as it exists before conflict begins. The _inciting incident_ interrupts the harmony and balance of the situation and one or more of the characters come into conflict with an outside force, with his or her own nature, or with another character. During the plot events that constitute the _rising action_, the things that happen in the work build toward an irreversible _climax_, or pivotal point, after which the _falling action_ leads inevitably toward a revelation of meaning which occurs at the _denouement_, or unraveling, of the problem set up by the inciting incident. Examples of each stage from _Jane Eyre_ follow:

- **Exposition:** The first two sections of the novel, Gateshead Hall and Lowood School, provide details of Jane’s childhood and adolescence. She demonstrates courage by standing up to John Reed, Mrs. Reed, and Mr. Brocklehurst and learns to balance her temper with patience from Helen Burns and Miss Temple.

- **Inciting incident:** Serious conflicts for Jane begin when she takes a job as a governess at Thornfield Hall.

- **Rising action:** Jane falls in love with her employer Mr. Rochester as she grows increasingly fearful of whatever haunts the attic.

- **Climax:** After Jane accepts Rochester’s marriage proposal and endures his outrageous courtship methods, her discomfort turns to horror and humiliation when she finally meets Bertha Mason Rochester, his wife in the attic.

- **Falling action:** Jane escapes Rochester and his desire to make her his pampered mistress and after much trouble finds herself at Moor House where her only living relatives take her in and help her recover.

- **Denouement:** After Jane fends off St. John’s advances, she returns to Mr. Rochester, now blinded and crippled, but a widower whom she happily and legally marries at Ferndean in the end.

_Conflict_ is a term that describes the tension between opposing forces in a work of literature and is an essential element of plot. Some of the more common conflicts involve the following
forces: a person in opposition to another person; a person opposing fate; an internal battle involving contradictory forces within a character, a person fighting against the forces of nature, or a person in opposition to some aspect of his or her society. Examples of each conflict from Jane Eyre follow:

- **A person in opposition to another person:** Jane v. John and Mrs. Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, St. John
- **A person opposing fate:** Jane v. her position in life as an orphan, a charity school girl, a lowly governess, a village schoolmarm
- **An internal battle involving contradictory forces within a character:** Jane v. her strong feelings for Rochester when he is still a married man
- **A person fighting against the forces of nature:** Jane v. the elements and dire hunger when she wanders penniless on the moors after escaping Rochester
- **A person in opposition to some aspect of his or her society:** Jane v. the rest of society when she, a mere governess, first accepts Rochester’s marriage proposal

Flashback is a scene that interrupts the action of a work to show a previous event: e.g., at different points in Jane Eyre, Rochester tells the stories of his affair with Celine Varens, the French opera singer, and of his entrapment into a marriage with Bertha Mason, the West Indian madwoman.

Foreshadowing is the use of hints or clues in a narrative to suggest future action: e.g., in Jane Eyre:

As I looked up at them, the moon appeared momentarily in that part of the sky which filled their fissure; her disk was blood-red and half overcast; she seemed to throw on me one bewildered, dreary glance, and buried herself again instantly in the deep drift of cloud. The wind fell, for a second, round Thornfield; but far away over wood and water, poured a wild, melancholy wail: it was sad to listen to, and I ran off again. (243)

The eerie color of the moon and the wild cry occur shortly before Jane’s illegal wedding. Both warn of the forthcoming disastrous ceremony and the revelation of Rochester’s mad wife locked in Thornfield’s attic.

Suspense is the quality of a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem that makes the reader or audience uncertain or tense about the outcome of events. Because Jane Eyre tells her own story, we experience her confusion about Grace Poole, her dread of the eerie cries and laughter, her fear of the figure who visits her in the night to tear her wedding veil. Our discomfort grows as does Jane’s during Rochester’s courtship. We know something bad will happen and learn just how bad when Mr. Mason and lawyer stop Jane’s wedding. The tension builds as we climb up to the attic with Jane and finally relents as we come face to face with Bertha Mason Rochester.

Point of view is the perspective from which a narrative is told. Some technical terms for different points of view include omniscient and limited; however, point of view can also refer to the bias of the person or thing through whose eyes the reader experiences the action. Jane Eyre tells her story from her perspective from the distance of ten years’ time, therefore limiting her story yet providing the understanding she has gained over the years.

Shift in point of view—The point of view shifts to Rochester’s in Chapter 26 when he explains to Jane the history of his marriage to Bertha.
Rhetorical Shift or turn refers to a change or movement in a piece resulting from an epiphany, realization, or insight gained by the speaker, a character, or the reader. In Jane Eyre when Jane falls in love with Rochester, her language reflects her new-found happiness:

I felt at times as if he were my relation, rather than my master: yet he was imperious sometimes still; but I did not mind that; I saw it was his way. So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred. My thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up, my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength. (129)

Of course, this happiness she feels now only makes more painful her disappointment later when she discovers Rochester already has a wife.

Setting is the time and place in which events in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem take place. Jane Eyre takes place in the early 19th century and has five major settings: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Moor House (Marsh End), and Ferndean Manor.

Style is the writer’s characteristic manner of employing language.

Theme is the central message of a literary work. It is not the same as a subject, which can be expressed in a word or two: courage, survival, war, pride, etc. The theme is the idea the author wishes to convey about that subject. It is expressed as a sentence or general statement about life or human nature. A literary work can have more than one theme, and most themes are not directly stated but are implied. The reader must think about all the elements of the work and use them to make inferences, or reasonable guesses, as to what themes seem to be implied. An example of a theme on the subject of pride might be that pride often precedes a fall. Themes in Jane Eyre might be stated as, “Be true to your beliefs” and “Act from a balance of passion and reason.”

Tone is the writer’s or speaker’s attitude toward a subject, character, or audience, and it is conveyed through the author’s choice of words and detail. Tone can be serious, humorous, sarcastic, indignant, objective, etc. Jane’s description of the morning after Rochester proposes to her reflects her intense happiness:

I was not surprised, when I ran down into the hall, to see that a brilliant June morning had succeeded to the tempest of the night; and to feel, through the open glass door, the breathing of a fresh and fragrant breeze. Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy. A beggar-woman and her little boy—pale, ragged objects both—were coming up the walk, and I ran down and gave them all the money I happened to have in my purse—some three or four shillings: good or bad, they must partake of my jubilee. The rooks cawed, and blither birds sang, but nothing was so merry or so musical as my own rejoicing heart. (226)

Again, this supreme happiness of hers will soon come crashing down when Jane learns of the existence of Bertha Mason Rochester.

Tone shift and multiple tones reveal changes in attitude or create new attitudes; e.g., when Jane has run from Rochester and has to spend the night on the moor, at first her tone is apprehensive—“What was I to do? Where to go? Oh, intolerable questions, when I could do nothing and go nowhere!” (284) But then she adjusts and her tone grows calm: “I looked at the
sky; it was pure: a kindly star twinkled just above the chasm ridge. The dew fell, but with propitious softness; no breeze whispered. Nature seemed to me benign and good…” (285).

Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are words or phrases that describe one thing in terms of something else. They always involve some sort of imaginative comparison between seemingly unlike things. Not meant to be taken literally, figurative language is used to produce images in a reader’s mind and to express ideas in fresh, vivid, and imaginative ways. The most common examples of figurative language, or figures of speech, used in both prose and poetry, are simile, metaphor, and personification.

Apostrophe is a form of personification in which the absent or dead are spoken to as if present and the inanimate, as if animate. These are all addressed directly: e.g., the night after Jane learns about Rochester, she lies in her room thinking what to do:

She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable
folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurable distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart—‘My daughter, flee temptation!’ ‘Mother, I will’ (281).

Motherless Jane finds the comfort and support she needs in the light of the moon just as she will find in the heath after she runs from Thornfield.

Metaphor is a comparison of two unlike things not using like or as: e.g., in Bronte’s Jane Eyre:

“The gaping wound of my wrongs, too, was now quite healed, and the flame of resentment extinguished” (200). Here, Jane has returned to Gateshead to visit her aunt Mrs. Reed on her deathbed. She calls her old emotional hurt a “wound” and her resentment “flame,” and both are now gone.

Also, “A fierce cry seemed to give the lie to her favourable report: the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet” (258). In this quote, Jane says upon first seeing her that Bertha literally is a lowly hyena, a scavenging animal.

Both quotes enhance understanding of and offer insight into Jane’s emotions.

Extended (controlling) metaphor differs from a regular metaphor in that it is sustained for several lines or sentences or throughout a work. Bronte sustains the “Bertha as less-than-human (animal)” metaphor throughout the story.

Metonymy is a form of metaphor in which the name of one thing is applied to another thing with which it is closely associated: e.g., in Jane Eyre Bertha Mason burns Rochester’s bed and later tears Jane’s lavish wedding veil. Both “bed” and “veil” represent to Bertha the union she had at one time with Rochester. Her destruction of both items symbolizes the rage she feels at what Rochester is doing.
**Oxymoron** is a form of paradox that combines a pair of opposite terms into a single unusual expression: e.g., in *Jane Eyre* when St. John explains to Jane why he will not marry Rosamond Oliver, the great love of his life, he calls what he feels a “delicious poison” (328). He knows that his marriage to Rosamond would consume his passion, distracting him from his goal to be a missionary. (Poison is not “delicious.”) In another instance, St. John reacts to Jane’s refusal to marry him: “most bitterly he smiled” (363). (Genuine smiles are not “bitter.”)

**Paradox** occurs when the elements of a statement contradict each other. Although the statement may appear illogical, impossible, or absurd, it turns out to have a coherent meaning that reveals a hidden truth: e.g., in Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* it is paradoxical that Mr. Rochester must go blind before he can “see” the errors of his ways and gain humility.

**Personification** is a kind of metaphor that gives inanimate objects or abstract ideas human characteristics: e.g., in *Jane Eyre*: “Your pity, my darling, is the suffering mother of love; its anguish is the very natal pang of the divine passion. I accept, Jane; let the daughter have free advent—my arms wait to receive her” (270). Here, Rochester tries to persuade Jane to live with him as his mistress, and his comparison of pity to a mother is meant to play upon Jane’s sympathetic nature.

**Pun** is a play on words that are identical or similar in sound but have sharply diverse meanings. Puns can have serious as well as humorous uses: e.g., Jane’s last name “Eyre” might be a play on “air” (Rochester’s describing her consistently as an enchanted being) or on “heir” (Jane inherits a fortune large enough to split four ways) or “err” (Jane makes mistakes). Another pronunciation of “Eyre” is “ire.” Jane learns to express her “ire” and to control it as she grows more mature.

**Simile** is a comparison of two different things or ideas through the use of the words *like* or *as*. It is definitely stated comparison in which the writer says one thing is like another: e.g., in Jane Eyre when Jane has caught up with a blinded, maimed Rochester at Ferndean: “The water stood in my eyes to hear this avowal of his dependence: just as if a royal eagle, chained to a perch, should be forced to entreat a sparrow to become its purveyor” (387). Jane has always considered Rochester to be a powerful, controlling man. Now his helplessness reminds her of a chained majestic hunting bird reduced to requesting help from a little songbird.

**Epic, or Homeric, simile** is more involved, more ornate than the typical simile. When trying to make something new and strange understandable to their audience, authors compare it to something familiar. For example, when St. John pressures Jane to marry him, she hears a voice calling her, giving her strength to resist St. John. She thinks about it later:

> The wondrous shock of feeling had come like the earthquake which shook the foundations of Paul and Silas’s prison: it had opened the doors of the soul’s cell, and loosed its bands—it had wakened it out of its sleep, whence it sprang trembling, listening, aghast; then vibrated thrice a cry on my startled ear, and in my quaking heart, and through my spirit; which neither feared nor shook, but exulted as in joy over the success of one effort it had been privileged to make, independent of the cumbrous body. (371)
Bronte refers to a biblical story her audience would have been sure to recognize. Jane feels as if she has been released miraculously from prison by something similar to an earthquake when she hears the voice.

**Synecdoche** is a form of metaphor in which a part of something is used to signify the whole: e.g., “All hands on deck.” Also, the reverse, whereby the whole can represent a part, is synecdoche: e.g., “Canada played the United States in the Olympic hockey finals.” Another form of synecdoche involves the container representing the thing being contained: e.g., “The pot is boiling.” In one last form of synecdoche, the material from which an object is made stands for the object itself: e.g., “The quarterback tossed the pigskin.” An example from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* occurs in Antony’s speech: “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears” (III,ii,75). In *Jane Eyre* Jane marries the blind, maimed Rochester and says, “Mr. Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near—that knit us so very close! For I was then his vision as I am still his right hand” (397). She means, of course, that even though he still has his “right hand,” he relies on her for help.

**Sound Devices**

**Sound devices** are stylistic techniques that convey meaning through sound. Some examples of sound devices are *rhyme* (two words having the same sound), *assonance* (repetition of similar vowel sounds), *consonance* (repetition of consonant sounds in the middle or at the end of words), *alliteration* (words beginning with the same consonant sound), and *onomatopoeia* (words which sound like their meaning).

**Alliteration** is the practice of beginning several consecutive or neighboring words with the same sound: e.g., Jane Eyre describes a perfect summer day: “I saw a bee busy among the sweet bilberries.” The repetition of the “b” captures the erratic movement of the insect.

**Assonance** is the repetition of vowel sounds in a series of words: e.g., the words “cry” and “side” have the same vowel sound and so are said to be in assonance: e.g., Jane Eyre returns to Thornfield after her encounter with the stranger (Rochester) whose horse slipped on ice and who needed her to help him. At this point Thornfield is cozy, but dull for her: “The hall was not dark, nor yet was it lit, only by the high-hung bronze lamp: a warm gentle suffused bright and the lower steps of the oak staircase” (102). The repeated “o” gives the scene a mellowness, but all that will change when she finds that the stranger she helped is Rochester who has arrived home.

**Consonance** is the repetition of a consonant sound within a series of words to produce a harmonious effect: e.g., when Jane Eyre is lost and wandering the moors, she says, “while the rain descends so, must I lay my head on the cold, drenched ground?” (290). She wishes to die at this point, and the “d” sound suggests a dull, thudding finality. Just before this scene, she looks up at the Milky Way: “Remembering what it was—what countless systems there swept space like a soft trage of light—I felt the might and strength of God” (285). The repeated “s” suggests a sighing or a “shushing” sound a mother might use to soothe an unhappy child, something Jane has never heard.
**Meter** is the measured, patterned arrangement of syllables according to stress and length in a poem. In the lines from the song Rochester sings to Jane (see *rhyme*) the meter alternates from *tetrameter* (4 stressed syllables per line) to *trimeter* (3 stressed syllables per line). Authors provide variations in rhythm and meter to keep poems from becoming repetitious or too predictable.

**Onomatopoeia** (*imitative harmony*) is the use of words that mimic the sounds they describe: e.g., “hiss,” “buzz,” “bang.” When onomatopoeia is used on an extended scale in a poem, it is called *imitative harmony*. The sounds Bertha Mason makes when the wedding party confronts her in her attic room are onomatopoetic: “snatched,” “growled,” “bellowed.” These words recreate the animal sounds she makes.

**Rhyme** is the repetition of sounds in two or more words or phrases that appear close to each other in a poem. *End rhyme* occurs at the end of lines, *internal rhyme*, within a line. A *rhyme scheme* is the pattern of end rhymes. The following lines from *Jane Eyre* illustrate how regular rhyme (a rhyme scheme of ABAB) connects the lines of the ballad with clarity and concision:

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My feet they are sore, and my limbs they are weary;  
Long is the way, and the mountains are wild;  
Soon will the twilight close moonless and dreary  
Over the path of the poor orphan child. (18)
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Bessie sings this song to Jane; it captures Jane’s present and foreshadows her future. Rhyme can enhance the experience of reading a poem and can promote memory through the pattern of sounds.

**Rhythm** is the varying speed, intensity, elevation, pitch, loudness, and expressiveness of speech, especially poetry. The rhythm of this stanza from a song Rochester sings for Jane is *iambic* rhythm with the first syllable unstressed and the second syllable stressed throughout:

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“Her coming was my hope each day, (iambic tetrameter)
Her parting was my pain, (iambic trimester)
The chance that did her steps delay (iambic tetrameter)
Was ice in every vein” (239). (iambic trimester)
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Iambic rhythm is the natural rhythm of the English language and has a smooth, flowing feel to it as does this song.
Rhetorical Devices and Literary Techniques

Allusion is a reference to a mythological, literary, or historical person, place, or thing: e.g., in Charlotte’s Bronte’s Jane Eyre: “I lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle” (93). The echoes of “Bluebeard” become obvious as the story of Rochester’s mad wife locked in the attic unfolds.

Anaphora is a contrast or opposition. St. John with his icy disposition is the antithesis of the fiery nature of Rochester:

“We have just drawn a rather too overwhelming contrast. Your words have delineated very prettily a graceful Apollo: he is present to your imagination, tall, fair, blue-eyed, and with a Grecian profile. Your eyes dwell on a Vulcan, a real blacksmith, brown, broad-shouldered, and blind and lame into the bargain” (388-389).

Bronte’s allusions to Apollo and Vulcan capture perfectly the contrast between the two men.

Argumentation functions by convincing or persuading an audience or by proving or refuting a point of view or an issue. Argumentation uses induction, moving from observations about particular things to generalizations, or deduction, moving from generalizations to valid inferences about particulars, or some combination of the two as its patter of development. Composers of arguments will also use a combination of both logical (logos) and emotional (pathos) evidence to establish their credibility as writers or speakers or their ethical appeal (ethos). Though there are no formal arguments in Jane Eyre, the conflicts between (or within) the characters illustrate the appeals made in attempts to persuade the audience.

Emotional—In his attempts to make Jane agree to become his mistress, Rochester plays upon her guilt feelings: “Then you condemn me to live wretched, and to die accursed?... Then you snatch love and innocence from me? You fling me back on lust for a passion—vice for an occupation?... Is it better to drive a fellow-creature to despair than to transgress a mere human law—no man being injured by the breach?...” (278-279).

Ethical—St. John employs the tactic of posing as God’s voice as he tries to convince Jane to marry him: “A missionary’s wife you must be—shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my sovereign’s service. Think like me, Jane—trust like me. It is the Rock of Ages I ask you to lean on: do not doubt but it will bear the weight of your human weakness?” (354).

Logical—In his attempts to persuade Jane to marry him and become a missionary, St. John appeals to Jane’s reason, to her logic, by enumerating her strengths: “In the village school I found you could perform well, punctually, uprightly, labour uncongenial to your habits and inclinations; I saw you could perform it with capacity and tact: you could win while you controlled” (355). Earlier Jane uses her logic to resist Rochester’s appeals: “I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will
hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them what would be their worth? They have a worth—so I have always believed…” (279).

**Cause/Effect** is one of the traditional rhetorical strategies consisting of arguing from the presence or absence of the cause to the existence or nonexistence of the effect or result or, conversely, in arguing from an effect to its probable causes. As Jane wrestles with her conscience and her sympathy for Rochester, she fears by leaving him she will be the cause of his return to a life of dissipation and ultimately his ruin: “Oh, comply! It (feeling) said. ‘Think of his misery; think of his danger—look at his state when left alone; remember his headlong nature; consider the recklessness following on despair—soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his’” (279).

**Classification** is one of the traditional ways of thinking about a subject, identifying the subject as a part of a larger group with shared features. Jane asks Helen Burns about the teachers at Lowood School and, though Helen will not criticize them or classify the teachers as good or bad, Jane does. She thinks Miss Scatcherd is a bad teacher because she constantly picks at Helen for the slightest infraction. Jane thinks Miss Temple is the best teacher because she is so kind, dignified, and intelligent.

**Comparison** is a traditional rhetorical strategy based on the assumption that a subject may be shown more clearly by pointing out ways it is similar to something else. The two subjects may each be explained separately and then their similarities are pointed out. For example, Rochester explains to Jane about living with his mistresses, how it is “the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading” (274). And Jane sees that she would be no different from Celine, Giacinta, or Clara:

> I felt the truth of these words; and I drew from them the certain inference, that if I were so far to forget myself and all the teaching that had ever been instilled into me as—under any pretext—with any justification—through any temptation—to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory. (274)

**Contrast** is a traditional rhetorical strategy based on the assumption that a subject may be shown more clearly by pointing out ways in which it is unlike another subject. When Jane first hears of Blanch Ingram’s beauty, she tries to maintain her grip on reality (she has no business falling in love with her employer) through painting two portraits showing the contrast between her and Blanche—“Portrait of a Governess, disconnect, poor, and plain” and, “Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank” (141).

**Characterization** is the act of creating or developing a character. In direct characterization the author directly states a character’s traits. Through Jane’s character, Bronte makes direct statements about Rochester’s character.
...all my acquaintances with him was confined to an occasional encounter in the hall, on the stairs, or in the gallery, when he would sometimes pass me haughtily and coldly, just acknowledging my presence by a distant not or a cool glance, and sometimes bow and smile with gentlemanlike affability. His changes of mood did not offend me, because I saw that I had nothing to do with their alternation; the ebb and flow depended on causes quite disconnected with me. (113)

Bronte also used *indirect characterization* to reveal Rochester's character. Rochester talks with Jane during his first evening at home, questioning her about her skills and demanding that she demonstrate her piano playing. Soon after she begins playing, "'Enough! He called out in a few minutes. 'You play a little, I see, like any other English schoolgirl: perhaps rather better than some, but not well'" (109). His comments reveal his brusque, imperious manner.

*Hyperbole* is a deliberate, extravagant, and often outrageous exaggeration. It may be used for either serious or comic effect: e.g., in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*:

> My hopes were all dead—struck with a subtle doom.... I looked on my cherished wishes, yesterday so blooming and glowing: they lay stark, chill, livid corpses that could never revive. I looked at my love: that feeling which was my master's—which he had created; it shivered in my heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle; sickness and anguish had seized it; it could not seek Mr. Rochester's arms—it could not derive warmth from his breast. Oh, never more could it turn to him; for faith was blighted—confidence destroyed! (260)

These words of Jane's capture the seriousness of her mood shortly after her discovery of Rochester's dishonesty, but the words are excessive because Jane never truly loses her hope, faith, or confidence.

*Irony* occurs in three types. *Dramatic irony* occurs when a character or speaker says or does something that has different meanings from what he thinks it means, though the audience and other characters understand the full implications of the speech or action: e.g., Oedipus curses the murderer of Laius, not realizing that he is himself the murderer and so is cursing himself. Also, in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*:

> [Mr. Brocklehurst]"...each of the young persons before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven; these, I repeat, must be cut off; think of the time wasted, of—" Mr. Brocklehurst was here interrupted: three other visitors, ladies, now entered the room. They ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress, for they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs. The two younger of the trio (fine girls of sixteen and seventeen) had grey beaver hats, then in fashion, shaded with ostrich plumes, and from under the brim of this graceful head-dress fell a profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled; the elder lady was enveloped in a costly velvet shawl, trimmed with ermine, and she wore a false front of French curls. (56)

In this scene, Mr. Brocklehurst has just ordered haircuts for the impoverished girls at Lowood School so they aren't indulging in vanity when in walk his wife and daughters decked out in the latest fashions and sporting fashionable hairdos. He obviously does not see the irony here in applying different rules to his own family than to the girls at Lowood.
**Situational irony** occurs when a situation turns out differently from what one would normally expect—though often the twist is oddly appropriate: e.g., in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*:

‘... that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not lawfully be joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it...’

He paused, as the custom is. When is the pause after that sentence ever broken by reply? Not, perhaps, once in a hundred years. And the clergyman, who had not lifted his eyes from his book, and had held his breath but for a moment, was proceeding: his hand was already stretched towards Mr. Rochester, as his lips unclosed to ask ‘Wilt thou have this woman for they wedded wife?’—when a distinct and near voice said;—‘The marriage cannot go on: I declare the existence of an impediment’ (254).

It is ironic that Jane has just thought about how the ceremony is rarely stopped because of an impediment when hers is interrupted by Mr. Briggs, the London solicitor, who announces that Rochester “has a wife now living.”

**Verbal irony** occurs when a speaker or narrator says one thing while meaning the opposite. When Rochester takes the wedding party to the attic to display Bertha Mason Rochester to them, she attacks him. After he and Grace Poole subdue Bertha, he turns to the group and says, “‘That is my wife’” (248). Of course, he means she is not his wife in any sense of the word except legally.

**Sarcasm** is the use of verbal irony in which a person appears to be praising something but is actually insulting it. It can also be a taunting or caustic remark. For example, when St. John Rivers tries to persuade Jane to accompany him to India as a missionary’s wife, she finally realizes why he makes her uncomfortable and refuses to marry him, saying she will accompany him only as a sister: “‘Oh! I will give my heart to God,’ I said. ‘You do not want it!’” (357).

**Motif** is a term that describes a pattern or strand of imagery or symbolism in a work of literature. For example, fire recurs throughout *Jane Eyre*—Bertha Mason sets Rochester’s bedroom on fire and later all of Thornfield Hall. Rochester’s suffering from his burns brings about his ultimate redemption and the return of his true love.

**Satire** refers to the use of humorous devices like irony, understatement, and exaggeration (hyperbole) to highlight a human folly or a societal problem. The purpose of satire is to bring the flaw to the attention of the reader in order that it may be addressed, remedied, or eradicated. In Chapters 17-19 of *Jane Eyre*, Bronte exaggerates the flaws of the Ingrians and other member of the upper class at Rochester’s house party. Her criticism of their behavior enhances Jane’s character, for she is above reproach.

**Symbolism** is the use of any object, person, place, or action that both has a meaning in itself and that stands for something larger than itself, such as a quality, attitude, belief, or value. There are two basic types, universal and contextual: e.g., a symbol that is common to all mankind is universal and a symbol that is used in a particular way by an individual author is contextual. For example, in *Jane Eyre*, the chestnut tree stands as a contextual symbol of what happens to Jane and Rochester. They will be separated for a time, but rejoined after Rochester suffers burns and mutilation trying to rescue Bertha from a burning Thornfield:
...I faced the wreck of the chestnut-tree; it stood up, black and riven: the trunk, split down the centre, gasped ghastly. The cloven halves were not broken from each other, for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below; though community of vitality was destroyed—the sap could flow no more; their great boughs on each side were dead, and next winter's tempests would be sure to fell one or both to earth: as yet, however they might be said to form one tree—a ruin, but an entire ruin. (243)

**Understatement** (meiosis, litotes) is the opposite of hyperbole. It is a kind of irony that deliberately represents something as being much less that it really is: e.g., Jane Eyre tries to make sense of Grace Poole and her eccentric behavior. Puzzled by everyone's tolerance of Grace, she will not allow herself to grow too alarmed: “When thus alone I not unfrequently heard Grace Poole’s laugh...” (96). Her understated thoughts help keep her panic to a minimum.

**Literary Forms**

**Aristotle's Rules for Tragedy**

**Catharsis** is the release of emotions (pity and fear) from the audience’s perspective: e.g., After watching *Antigone*, the audience will feel pity for the tragic deaths and fear for themselves because if even the “best” in society fall, what future awaits the common man?

**Dramatic Unities**

*Time* — The play has to take place within a 24-hour period. For example, *Antigone* takes place in “real” time; the audience experiences the action as it unfolds.

*Place* — The action of the play is set in one place. *Antigone* is set in front of the royal palace in Thebes.

*Action* — There is one hero and one plot. The action in *Antigone* focuses on Antigone’s determination to bury her brother Polynices and the consequences of her actions.

**Hamartia** is the tragic flaw that leads to the tragic hero’s downfall. For example, Creon’s tragic flaw of holding himself above the prophet and the laws of the gods dooms him.

**Hubris** is arrogance before the gods. Creon’s pride and arrogance cause his downfall.

**Recognition** — As the hero meets his catastrophe, he recognizes his flaw and why he must die. Creon acknowledges his responsibility for the deaths of his family and confesses he was too proud.

**Reversal** is when the opposite of what the hero intends occurs. Creon thinks he is doing the right thing by imprisoning Antigone, but this action leads to the suicides of his son and his wife.
Language Rhythms --
The Music in Words
C. D’Agostino

He was a man past middle age, who with nothing to start with but sound health and a certain grim and puritanical affinity for abstinence and endurance had made a fair farm out of the barren scrap of hill land which he had bought at less than a dollar an acre and married and raised a family on it and fed and clothed them all and even educated them after a fashion. taught them at least hard work, so that as soon as they became big enough to resist him, boys and girls too, they left home (one was a professional nurse, one a prostitute; the oldest had simply vanished completely) so that there now remained the small neat farm which likewise had been worked to the point of mute and unflagging mutual hatred and resistance but which could not leave him and so far had not been able to eject him but which possibly knew that it could and would outlast him, and his wife who possibly had the same, perhaps not hope for resisting, but maybe staff and prop for bearing and enduring.

W. Faulkner

He would not think about that. That was not his business. That was Goli’s business. He had only one thing to do and that was what he should think about and he must think it out clearly and take everything as it came along, and not worry. To worry was as bad as to be afraid. It simply made things more difficult . . . Think about them being away, he said. Think about them going through the timber. Think about them crossing a creek. Think about them riding through the heather. Think about them going up the slope. Think about them O.K. tonight. Think about them traveling, all night. Think about them hiding up tomorrow. Think about them. God damn it, think about them. That’s just as far as I can think about them, he said.

E. Hemingway

But mountains yes Rose did think about mountains and about blue when it was on the mountains and feathers when clouds like feathers were on the mountains and birds when one little bird and two little birds and three and four and six and seven and ten and seventeen and thirty or forty little birds all came flying and a big bird came flying and they flew higher than the big bird and they came down and one and then two and then five and then fifty of them came picking down on the head of the big bird and slowly the big bird came falling down between the mountain and the little birds all went home again.

G. Stein

Instead of the staccato cadences of short, choppy sentences, we hear the flowing cadences of Faulkner’s inordinately long sentences; in fact, the entire paragraph is one long sentence, with the ebb and flow of a minister intoning dire predictions about the wages of a life of sin. Next, Faulkner almost miraculously compresses one man’s history from youth to “past middle age” - including what happened to his five children and an observation on his wife’s personality-into one brief vignette. Finally the language is far more demanding than Hemingway’s: observe such words as “affinity,” “reject,” “puritanical,” “affinity,” and “abstinence.”

What characterizes the famous Hemingway voice is, first, recurrence used almost to excess: “think about” is repeated fourteen times. Thinking, under the circumstances, is what the protagonist has a hard time doing; in his staccato language rhythms we sense a thinly controlled panic. The sentences are short, the whole piece in the hard-driving punctuated rhythm of a man’s thought, a trapped man in danger of his life. No unnecessary description and no flowing lines are to be found here in this “masculine” piece. The language, too, contributes to the sense of panic - it is so simple as to be elementary - a condition of living experienced when in a state of panic.
TONE WORDS: A LIST
Largely taken from The AP Vertical Teams Guide for English

Below is a good, solid list of tone words - and in fact, it may be a list you’ve seen before. The list is not exhaustive; feel free and perhaps encouraged to use words that do not show up here. Nonetheless, what you have here gives you a good starting place for going beyond the simplistic happy-sad-angry - and while those words are listed, they are often not specific enough. When choosing those words, strongly consider using them in conjunction with other more precise words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>angry</th>
<th>sad</th>
<th>happy</th>
<th>satiric</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sharp</td>
<td>cold</td>
<td>fanciful</td>
<td>sentimental</td>
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<tr>
<td>upset</td>
<td>urgent</td>
<td>complimentary</td>
<td>dramatic</td>
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<tr>
<td>silly</td>
<td>joking</td>
<td>condescending</td>
<td>provocative</td>
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<tr>
<td>boring</td>
<td>poignant</td>
<td>sympathetic</td>
<td>pitiful</td>
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<tr>
<td>afraid</td>
<td>detached</td>
<td>contemptuous</td>
<td>didactic</td>
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<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>confused</td>
<td>apologetic</td>
<td>giddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hollow</td>
<td>childish</td>
<td>humorous</td>
<td>proud</td>
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<tr>
<td>joyful</td>
<td>peaceful</td>
<td>horrific</td>
<td>restrained</td>
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<tr>
<td>allusive</td>
<td>mocking</td>
<td>sarcastic</td>
<td>somber</td>
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<tr>
<td>sweet</td>
<td>objective</td>
<td>nostalgic</td>
<td>candid</td>
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<tr>
<td>vexed</td>
<td>vibrant</td>
<td>zealous</td>
<td>dreamy</td>
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<tr>
<td>tired</td>
<td>frivolous</td>
<td>irreverent</td>
<td>shocking</td>
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<tr>
<td>bitter</td>
<td>audacious</td>
<td>benevolent</td>
<td>seductive</td>
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Awareness: Shift in Tone

Good authors rarely use only one tone. While this is obvious with a novel, it is usually the case in short stories as well as poems. The sonnet, for instance, is set up to contain a shift in tone, and understanding that is often the key to understanding the poem itself.

In your quest for shifts in tone, here are some clues you should seek:
- key words (e.g., but, yet, nevertheless, however, although)
- punctuation (dashes, periods, semicolons)
- stanza and paragraph divisions
- changes in line and stanza or in sentence length
- sharp contrasts in diction

If You’re into Acronyms

A little something to help you remember important elements for tone to consider when evaluating prose or poetry:

Diction: the connotation of the word choice
Images: vivid appeals to understanding through the senses
Details: facts that are included or those omitted
Language: the overall use of language, such as formal, clinical, jargon
Syntax: sentence structure and how it affects the reader’s attitude
### Literary Criticism: An Overview of Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical/Biographical</td>
<td>This approach helps to place allusions in their proper classical, political, or biblical background.</td>
<td>This approach tends to reduce art to the level of biography and make it relative (to the times) rather than universal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral/Philosophical</td>
<td>This approach emphasizes that the larger purpose of literature is to teach morality and to probe philosophical issues; it is an effective approach to discuss theme.</td>
<td>Detractors argue that such an approach is too judgmental. Some believe literature should be judged primarily on its artistic, not its moral or philosophical, merits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mimetic</td>
<td>Mimetic critics ask how well the work accords with the real world. Is it accurate? Is it correct? Is it moral? Does it show how people really act?</td>
<td>Same as moral/philosophical.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formalism/New Criticism</td>
<td>This approach involves close reading of the text. Formalist critics believe that all information essential to the interpretation of a work must be found within the work itself; there is no need to bring in outside information about the history, politics, or society of the time or the author’s historical context.</td>
<td>The text is seen in isolation. Formalism ignores the context of the work. It tends to reduce literature to little more than a collection of rhetorical devices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>These critics look at the psychological motivations of the characters or of the authors themselves. Most frequently, they apply Freudian psychology to works (id, ego, superego; concave images, phallic symbols, etc.)</td>
<td>Some works do not lend themselves readily to this approach. Critics seem to see sex in everything.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mythological/Archetypal/Symbolic</td>
<td>This approach assumes that there is a collection of symbols, images, characters, and motifs that evokes basically the same response in all people (collective unconscious). It provides a universal approach to literature and identifies a reason why certain literature may survive the test of time. It works well with highly symbolic works.</td>
<td>Literature may become little more than a vehicle for archetypes and may ignore the “art” of literature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>This approach is concerned with the impact of gender on writing and reading. It usually begins with a critique of patriarchal culture. Women have been somewhat underrepresented in the traditional canon, and a feminist approach to the literature redresses the problem.</td>
<td>It can become a political battlefield and overlooks the merits of works considered “patriarchal.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marxist</td>
<td>Marxism assumes the independent reality of matter and its priority over mind. It teaches a theory of value based on labor, the economic determination of all social actions and institutions, the class struggle as the basic pattern of history, the inevitable seizure of power through the revolution of the proletariat, and the ultimate establishment of a classless society.</td>
<td>It is highly controversial and limited to those works which lend themselves to class divisions and struggles over power and money.</td>
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