

What is literary criticism?

A literature critique, sometimes called a literary analysis or a literary critical analysis, is an examination of a piece of literature. The scope of a critique of literature may be to examine a single aspect of the work, or the work in its entirety, and involves breaking the literary piece apart into its separate components and evaluating how they fit together to accomplish the piece's purpose. Literary critiques are commonly executed by students, scholars, and literary critics, but anyone can learn how to critique literature!

Literary criticism can be defined as the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature. In general, a literary criticism answers two main questions: what was good or bad about the work and why that particular aspect is bad or good. A literary criticism is similar to a literary analysis in the sense that it analyses different aspects of the text and brings them together to evaluate whether the author has been successful in achieving his purpose. But, a literary criticism goes a step further and evaluates the work in relation to outside theories.

It is important to have some knowledge about literary theories before writing a literary criticism. These theories will help you to understand better the work of literature you are critiquing

Criticizing a Text

Let's review:

- When we **summarize** a text, we capture its main points.
- When we **analyze** a text, we consider how it has been put together—we dissect it, more or less, to see how it works

Here's a new term: when we **critique** (crih-TEEK) a text, we evaluate it, asking it questions. Critique shares a root with the word "criticize." Most of us tend to think of criticism as being negative or mean, but in the academic sense, doing a critique is not the least bit negative. Rather, it's a constructive way to better explore and understand the material we're working with. The word's origin means "to evaluate," and through our critique, we do a deep evaluation of a text.

When we critique a text, **we interrogate** it. Imagine the text, sitting on a stool under a bright, dangling light bulb while you ask, in a demanding voice, “What did you mean by having Professor Mustard wear a golden yellow fedora?”

Okay, seriously. When we critique, our own opinions and ideas become part of our textual analysis. We **question the text, we argue with it, and we delve into it for deeper meanings.**

Here are some ideas to consider when critiquing a text:

- How did you respond to the piece? Did you like it? Did it appeal to you? Could you identify with it?
- Do you agree with the main ideas in the text?
- Did you find any errors in reasoning? Any gaps in the discussion?
- Did the organization make sense?
- Was evidence used correctly, without manipulation? Has the writer used appropriate sources for support?
- Is the author objective? Biased? Reasonable? (Note that the author might just as easily be subjective, unbiased, and unreasonable! Every type of writing and tone can be used for a specific purpose. By identifying these techniques and considering *why* the author is using them, you begin to understand more about the text.)
- Has the author left anything out? If yes, was this accidental? Intentional?
- Are the text’s tone and language text appropriate?
- Are all of the author’s statements clear? Is anything confusing?
- What worked well in the text? What was lacking or failed completely?
- What is the cultural context* of the text?

*Cultural context is a fancy way of asking who is affected by the ideas and who stands to lose or gain if the ideas take place. When you think about this, think of all kinds of social and cultural variables, including age, gender, occupation, education, race, ethnicity, religion, economic status, and so forth.

These are only a few ideas relating to critique, but they’ll get you started. When you critique, try working with these statements, offering explanations to support your ideas. Bring in content from the text (textual evidence) to support your ideas.