

Thesis and Support: What Good Literary Analysis Includes

- 1) **A clear, courageous THESIS**—an interpretation, a point of emphasis, an argument that you seek to prove in your analysis.

A thesis may emerge as you go along, even as you draft your paper, but you will want to begin, at least, with a working thesis that will help you map out what you're looking for.

It might help first to think of HOW and WHY questions that will lead you to a thoughtful and enlightening thesis. For example:

- How are these two characters alike?
- How are they different?
- How does this character manage to win over the other characters?
- How does the narrator function in the story?
- Why is the ending of the novel surprising, or not?
- Why is this particular scene pivotal in the story or play?
- How is it that this play creates such sympathy for a given character?
- How exactly does this work create its emotional effect? Etc.

- 2) **Well-organized support.** Think through the reasons for your interpretation:

- Why do I think this?
- What in particular leads me to this argument?

Order your thoughts and think about what particular examples you can give to support your points. Your analysis should have a clear introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

- 3) **Concrete support, especially specific QUOTES.** Select quotes carefully and respect their contexts.

Introduce or integrate all quotations smoothly within your own sentences. Don't let a quote float by itself. At the end of a quotation **include a parenthetical page reference in the MLA form**, like "this" (305).

Don't just offer quote and run from it. You need to explain carefully how the quote relates to the point you're making—make explicit connections. **ANALYSIS** means examining the parts to better understand the whole, so do some careful examining:

- How does this passage lead you to your interpretation?
- How does this fit in with the rest of your paper's exploration? A quotation should clearly illustrate your own thinking, not replace it.

What a Literary Analysis is NOT

- 1) It is NOT a plot summary. Assume that your reader will already have some familiarity with the work.

For example: Rather than simply recount again what Hester Prynne does in her exile in The Scarlet Letter, explore **how** her exile changes her (or doesn't).

Or, rather than simply summarize the steps in Sarah Miles's conversion in The End of the Affair, explore **why** she struggles to believe or **why** Maurice Bendrix finally rejects the same kind of conversion. Etc.

- 2) It is NOT simply a gut response to a work. You won't convince an educated audience if you imply no more than "This is what it means to ME, and that's that." The proof is in the support. So, as far as good literary analysis goes, if you can't convincingly present your viewpoint to an audience, then you won't go very far.