

# QC Writing Center Guide to Writing Critical Lens Essays

## What is a critical lens essay?

A critical lens is a way of looking at a particular work of literature by focusing on style choices, plot devices, and character interactions and how they show a certain theme.

## What is the purpose of a critical lens essay?

A critical lens is a certain viewpoint you should look through as you analyze the piece of literature you were assigned. It could be a school of thought, such as a "Marxist" or "feminist" critical lens, or it could be a quote expressing some sort of general opinion. Make sure you know what this critical lens is and what it's all about. Talk to your professor or do additional research on the critical lens if necessary.

A critical lens essay should reveal something about the original or "target" text that may not be apparent otherwise. Alternatively, your analysis may call the validity of the arguments of the lens piece into question, extend arguments of the lens text, or provoke some other reevaluation of the two texts. Either way, you will be generating a critical "dialogue between texts."

## Basic steps for crafting a critical lens essay

- 1) Determine which critical theory will best fit your text.
- 2) The critical theory analyzes a text looking for different traits or through different focal points. Determine what traits or which focus best suits the critical theory you will use to analyze the text.
- 3) Now develop a thesis statement that identifies the critical theory to be applied and states what the use of this critical theory allows readers to see in this work.
- 4) Find examples from the text that support your thesis.
- 5) Find outside literary criticism or autobiography/biography (2 sources) that supports your claims.
- 6) Develop the body paragraphs of your essay with supporting details and commentary for each paragraph.
- 7) Develop a conclusion that evaluates how these stylistic elements affect the work.

## Crafting a critical lens essay

### 1) Understand the critical lens and what it is asking of you.

- Remember that a critical lens is a certain viewpoint that you should look through as you analyze your target text.

### 2) Analyze the piece of literature.

- The best thing is to reread it, if possible, with your critical lens in mind. As you read, highlight passages that seem to support the critical lens. You can use some of them in your paper. For example, if you are supposed to look at the text through a psychoanalytic critical lens, passages that have to deal with a father-son relationship could be used to expound on an overall Oedipal theme in your paper.

### 3) Craft an ORIGINAL thesis statement.

- A thesis statement is an overview of what your essay is going to be about, containing the basic argument you will be making in your essay. It should create an argument about an aspect of the critical lens that can be supported by direct quotes from your piece of literature. If you were given a prompt as part of your assignment, make sure your thesis statement directly answers it.

### 4) Write the introductory paragraph, which should basically be an extension of your thesis statement.

- Use it to explain any concepts you feel you need to go into detail about or to bring in anything you feel is necessary before you start getting deeper into the text. This should be a bridge into your work and establish the lens you will use to analyze the text.

### 5) Write your body paragraphs.

- You can go about this several ways: you can write each paragraph about a separate point you have to make about the text, or you can explain one point in a paragraph and then use the next several paragraphs to explain and analyze different passages that support it, then start a new point and do the same thing. The basic purpose of your body paragraphs is to go deep into the text and analyze it from the perspective of your critical lens. The topics of your body paragraphs must stem directly from your thesis statement. IN ADDITION TO YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE, YOU MUST USE TWO ADDITIONAL SOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR CLAIM/IDEAS. This task will require you to use outside literary criticism. YOU WILL CITE THREE WORKS IN YOUR PAPER AND HAVE THREE WORKS IN YOUR PROPERLY FORMATTED WORKS CITED PAGE.

### 6) Write your conclusion and tie everything together.

- You have several ways to go about it, but make sure this conclusion has a closing feel to it, and maybe adds a little something new, like a further explanation of the critical lens, or another analytical point that stems from earlier ones, so that it's

not just recycling what you've said before. If the introduction is the bridge into your essay, the conclusion should be the bridge out (back into the “real world”).

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