

Literary Analysis Paper Lesson

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Initial Thoughts

This is one of my favorite assignments because I love literature, and I think most people, even if they don't generally love literature, can get into it temporarily when a piece really resonates with them. I think at least one of our readings, that you'll then write about, will.

What is Literary Analysis?

A literary analysis is a critical examination of a piece of literature, such as a novel, poem, short story, or play. It involves a deep exploration of the text's themes, characters, symbolism, and literary techniques employed by the author. The goal is to uncover the underlying meaning and messages conveyed by the work, often delving into the author's intentions and the socio-cultural context in which it was written.

A well-executed literary analysis requires close reading and interpretation of the text, identifying key literary elements like plot structure, tone, and narrative perspective. It often involves dissecting the characters' motivations and development, as well as the use of symbolism, imagery, and figurative language to enhance the storytelling.

Additionally, a literary analysis may explore the impact of the work on its readers and society, highlighting its relevance and significance in the broader literary canon. Ultimately, it is an intellectual exercise that helps readers gain a deeper appreciation of literature by uncovering layers of meaning and insight within a written work.

What does literature offer?

Good literature isn't just entertaining, it's meaningful--it tells us something about ourselves, the world, and the human experience.

It's your job as the writer or a literary analysis -- a literary critic, a critical thinker, and an evaluator of text -- to suss out what some of those intended commentaries, life lessons, and ideas are.

Why do people write literary analyses?

You might think...what do these stories have to do with my life?

These stories have a lot to do with life, because people's lives are represented in the stories, and they touch on meaningful parts of our lives, like sibling relationships, class/race/gender issues, marital issues, mental health, physical health, aging, parenting, jealousy/rage/sadness/sorrow, etc. human nature, the human condition, etc. There's embedded cultural and societal significance/insight.

Literary analysis (and argument)

Even though we are calling it a literary analysis paper, it could just as aptly be called a literary argument paper. You will analyze a text, but in your writing, you will make an argument about it, analyzing as you do so. You analyze parts of the text, making text-to-text connections and text-to-world connections, to make your argument. Our paper is both argument and analysis.

Note that even if you've done a literary analysis paper previously, it's important to be mindful of our particular approach. As I just described, "literary analysis" is an umbrella term. There are numerous sub-approaches, so to speak, and what you've done before may or may not be the same or similar to what I put forth for our paper parameters and approach.

What you will do

You will analyze a short story.

You will choose from several short stories we read over the course of the unit.

Pick a story you not only like, but feel like you have some meaningful commentary about. Or pick a story you didn't love but have a lot to say about or have many thoughts about.

In this paper, you'll make an argument about what you think the writer's intention is, what cultural and social commentary the writer is trying to make. Note that there are many, many directions this can go in. A story usually contains commentary on many different aspects of life, people, and society. What you extrapolate or choose to focus on from a given story may be different from what another person extrapolates or chooses to focus on for the same story. And someone else extrapolates and focuses differently from that person.

As far as the writer's intention, of course you won't be able to know for sure. You're not able to interview or talk to the writer. What you put forth is your belief/your interpretation that this is something the writer was trying to say about life/humanity/society/interpersonal dynamics.

Writers are usually not singular in the statements or commentary they are making or the themes they're exploring. A single story can touch on emotions of jealousy, while also addressing class injustices, while also touching on alcoholism.

Writer's Intention

When it comes to writing about a writer's "intention," many students wonder...

How can they possibly know what a writer's intention is?

You cannot ask the writer. You cannot prove what their intention is.

That's okay.

You can only speculate through your "take" on the story--basically, your evaluation of the content and the context in which it is delivered.

This is the whole point of literary analysis--for you, the writer, to share your view of what you think the story and the writer are trying to bring to us as readers.

Use the Writer's Name

Since you are offering your ideas about what you think the writer is trying to accomplish through this story (in terms of conveying meaning, universal significance, social/cultural relevance), you should use phrases like..."Gish shows us that wealth has limitations..." "Avellaneda explores our tendency to..." "Johnson highlights the complexities of marriage..." "Pham allows us to see that..."

Your Ideas and Social Observations, Not Your Opinions

The paper should not be full of your personal opinions or experiences, along the lines of...

"I don't like how she was acting..."

"In my opinion, that was wrong and he should have..."

"This is exactly what happened to me five years ago..."

The analysis, thinking, and ideas are still coming from you, but they are just that--ideas and analysis--not your personal opinions and experiences.

Your opinions do come through in a certain way, but they are put forth through language that is more "at an objective distance," conveying insights, observations, and interpretations, not personal opinion or personal experience. It is a more intellectual approach and a more academic writing style.

The paper is a critical analysis connecting literature to the real world and modern-day social issues, not a personal response.

Pit yourself as a thinker, not a ranter.

Many Potential Points of Focus

Keep in mind that even though we refer to "why the writer wrote this story..." and "the writer's intention"...

There are countless ways you can frame this intention or why the writer wrote the story.

Let's use the story Cinderella, since most people know it, as an example...

You might think that the only thing one can focus on in writing about Cinderella is dreams coming true and going from rags to riches...

But this is not the case.

Potential Points of Focus for Cinderella

Jealousy between sisters -- comes from within or caused by parent(s)' differentiated treatment?

The role of older women mentors in young women's lives

Beauty standards in our society and our tendency to connect beautiful with good.

The idea of "limited time" on earth for enjoyment and fulfillment. (coach turns into pumpkin)

Step parent/step child dynamics rooted in insecurity

You and a classmate or many classmates could be doing the same story but all of you have very different papers because you're extrapolating and exploring a different theme or thread of meaning.

How the writer qualifies something

When you think about what the writer is saying or trying to show through the story, remember that there is an inherent "writer qualification." The word "qualification" means the quality of something, saying what something is like, the nature of it, the complexities of it. The writer is often qualifying something as a good thing or a bad thing, *or* presenting the qualities of a thing.

For instance, if the story you focus on is set in wartime, the writer might be saying war wears us down even when we are not in it but observing at a distance. This is not saying war is good or bad; it's just saying it has an effect on us, and putting forth what that effect is. A quality (or characteristic) of war is that it affects people.

The writer could also have a positive message about war – that despite the atrocities that come with war, it brings communities together and shows how heroic people can be. Of course, no writer would say that war is good, but...a writer could emphasize the good that comes out of it when it does happen.

Along these same lines, a writer could have an emphatically negative message about war.

So think about that: Is the writer saying something is a good thing or a bad thing or qualifying it in some way? What is their judgement? What is, according to the writer, the quality of the subject they're focusing on?

Countless Other Focuses

As I said, there are countless focuses you can take. So be sure to think beyond the main storyline or most obvious theme or thread of meaning to a side or periphery motif or element (if you want to). It's more enjoyable to write a paper on a short story if you focus on an aspect of it that intrigues or interests you.

Marxist Analysis

For instance, if you tend to take an interest in class struggle and boss/worker dynamics (inherent oppressions), analyze the story from that perspective. If you do, you are essentially doing what's called a **Marxist Analysis**. I'll have a separate video on this.

Feminist Analysis

Or, if you tend to take an interest in women's oppressions, rights, freedom, inequality (and fight for change); how women are treated as subordinate and secondary, etc., analyze how this is seen in the story & in what ways, and what those treatments say about our culture, society, etc. If you do, you are doing what's called a **Feminist Analysis**. I'll have a separate video on this as well.

Other Critical Approaches

Marxist Criticism or Analysis and Feminist Criticism or Analysis are just two of several types of critical approaches that literary analysts use to analyze a work. There are others, such as:

- Formalism
- Structuralism
- Deconstructionism

- Psychological Criticism
- Reader Response Criticism
- Cultural Studies
- New Historicism

If you are interested in any of these (or want to read more about Marxist Criticism and/or Feminist Criticism), there is a PDF document in our course shell called "Critical Approaches." It is a good resource.

However, you do not HAVE to use any of these approaches to write your paper. You may create your literary argument based on brainstorming from your own mind about themes, threads of meaning, and social & cultural commentary. (Sometimes, people end up doing feminist or Marxist analysis without realizing they are doing it.)

Then come up with a focused argument around that theme, thread of meaning, social/cultural commentary. What does the writer seem to be saying about your focus--is it good, bad, or something in-between? What are the writer's seeming qualifications and assertions about X (your focus)?

Just be sure that what you argue can be talked about within the context of the story itself AND that you can make connections to contemporary society, real-world issues and concerns, etc.

Thoughts on Your Literary Analysis Task

I hope this presentation gives you a solid idea of what you will be doing with the short story you choose.

You'll be speculating on the writer's intentions and explorations, you'll be thinking critically about plot details, situations, and characters, and you'll be making relevant observations about contemporary society in relation to the story.

Doing so transfers to all types of cognition and evaluation you'll do in college and in life.

Analyzing and thinking critically are crucial for students in higher education

Overall Structure for Literary Analysis Paper

This is a five-paragraph essay. We are focused on story themes or other points of critical analysis based on cultural observations, not on literary devices or concepts like symbolism, foreshadowing, setting, point-of-view, conflict, etc.

Introduction and Thesis Statement (total of about 8 to 10 sentences)

- Introduce the story by full title in quotation marks & author's full name, as well as year of publication. Can also include a sentence about how the story was received by audiences or some other statement that puts the story in context in terms of public or cultural impact.
- Give a plot synopsis (summary) of the story in 4 to 6 sentences. Do not go into minute detail. You just want to give the reader a sense of the beginning, middle, and end, and how important events and progressions unravel. Be sure to give even coverage.
- Have a transition statement or two that lead(s) your reader to your focused argument about the story (writer's intention/social or cultural commentary)
- Thesis Statement(s) (may be one statement or may be two statements, but no more than that).

Body Paragraph 1

- Develop one point you have in support of your thesis statement(s)/your argument. Your topic sentence makes *a claim* about the story.
- Reference the text either with a direct quote or direct quotes, or a description of the part you are talking about. Make it clear that you're referring to the story.
- Analyze the significance of the text you referenced in relation to your claim.

Body Paragraph 2

- Develop a 2nd point you have in support of your thesis statement(s)/your argument. Your topic sentence makes *a claim* about the story.
- Reference the text either with a direct quote or direct quotes, or a description of the part you are talking about. Make it clear that you're referring to the story.
- Analyze the significance of the text you referenced in relation to your claim.

Body Paragraph 3

- Develop a 3rd point you have in support of your thesis statement(s)/your argument. Your topic sentence makes *a claim* about the story.
- Reference the text either with a direct quote or direct quotes, or a description of the part you are talking about. Make it clear that you're referring to the story.
- Analyze the significance of the text you referenced in relation to your claim

(I will provide examples of developed body paragraphs soon)

Conclusion of Literary Analysis Paper

This should be a short 5 to 8 sentences conclusion in which you wrap up the paper, letting the reader know the cultural or social significance of the critique contained in the paper.

The conclusion should not be too long. Six to eight sentences might be appropriate, but there is no set length. Write what is appropriate to the length of your paper overall and what you have to say.

Consider these questions when crafting a conclusion:

Ultimately:

- What's at stake (for individuals, for society, for the world) regarding the thread of meaning/theme you focused on?
- What new perspectives do readers gain from this story's insights, portrayals, and revelations regarding the thread of meaning/theme you focused on?
- Why is it important that this story be read?
- Is the writer effective in conveying the thread of meaning/theme you focused on?
- How does society / our culture stand to benefit from exploring and understanding the surface story and its complexities?
- In what way does the story, and the thread of meaning/theme you focused on, relate to people's lives and our culture?

Sample Literary Analysis Conclusion

Ultimately, O'Brien wrote *Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong* as an indictment on war and its harmful effects not just on individuals but on relationships. Readers get a sense of American youths' sacrifice for their country. Young adults are sold the lofty idea of "serving their country," deemed noble, courageous, and right, but never encouraged to question the circumstances surrounding the country's involvement in various conflicts. The complexities of involvement and motivation may or may not, on moral or practical grounds, warrant the inevitable loss of innocence and irreparable changes in how young people relate to the world. O'Brien's tale is especially important considering the current political climate; Americans are more pacifist than ever, with more and more people opposing violence and aggression as answers to international problems. Instead, they advocate employing diplomacy and negotiations even when the country is attacked first. Mary Ann's disturbing fate is a poignant reinforcement of why society must continue to consider that approach.

Introduction of Literary Analysis Paper

Paragraph One / Introduction and Thesis Statement (total of about 8 to 10 sentences)

- Introduce the story by full title in quotation marks & author's full name, as well as year of publication. Can also include a sentence about how the story was received by

audiences or some other statement that puts the story in context in terms of public or cultural impact.

- Give a plot synopsis (summary) of the story in 4 to 6 sentences. Do not go into minute detail. You just want to give the reader a sense of the beginning, middle, and end, and how important events and progressions unravel. Be sure to give even coverage.
- Have a transition statement or two that lead(s) your reader to your focused argument about the story (writer's intention/social or cultural commentary)
- Thesis Statement(s) (may be one statement or may be two statements, but no more than that).

Example Introduction Paragraph

The story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" was written by Raymond Carver and published in 1974. It is one of his most popular works and continues to be referenced in pop culture. The story follows two couples one evening as they sit around debating love. Terri speaks at length about a past partner who was physically abusive and emotionally unstable, insisting that he loved her in his own way. Mel disputes this while Nick and Laura remain relatively quiet and non-judgmental; they believe that love isn't easy to define or pin down. Eventually, Mel, who's a doctor, tells a story about an older couple he once treated in the emergency room after a terrible car accident. He believes that their relationship embodied true love, in part because they endured together for so long. The story concludes with Mel ranting about his ex-wife and wanting to call his kids, and the two couples staring into the darkness – the alcohol gone – as they listen to the sounds of their hearts beating. The characters clearly have complex backgrounds, but the most prominent character is Mel, as he does most of the talking. The reader gets a full sense of his emotional range. Though Carver frames him as a very likeable person on the surface, it is obvious he also means to show Mel's darker side – his misogyny, a domineering personality, and vulnerability in relationships – as reflective of issues for modern men."

More Sample Introductions for Fiction Analysis / Critical Approach paper

Example 1

(Note: This is an introduction which includes introducing the story by title and author, giving a brief summary of the story, then leading into the type of critical approach employed (in this case, cultural studies). In bold is the thesis statement, which should be at the end of the introduction.

The short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" was written by Raymond Carver and published in 1981. It follows four characters – Mel, Terri, Nick, and Laura – one evening in which they sit around getting drunk and contemplating "real love." The characters have varying ideas, with Mel and Terri disagreeing and bickering the entire night. Mel is particularly adamant that he knows what real love is. He tells the tale of an old couple

who was in a near-fatal car accident but managed to survive and face the trying incident together, further solidifying their love of seventy years. Though the friends are touched by the story, the night also leaves them feeling weary and uncertain about their past and present experiences of love. In the end, we're left with the depressing image of the friends sitting silent, somber, and in the dark as they listen to each other's hearts beat. Carver's story has remained incredibly popular and socially relevant in the years since 1981, but it reflects its time more than any other. **Many cultural factors in the 1980s informed Carver's crafting of the story, including the phenomenon of no-fault divorce, materialism and greed, and self-absorption and self-centeredness.**

Example 2

(Note: This is one which introduces the story by title and author, but has no summary of the story. It simply discusses the critical approach for several sentences and soon segues into a thesis statement.)

"Bartleby the Scrivener" is a short story written and published by Herman Melville in the mid-1850s. It was one of Melville's only stories with an urban rather than seafaring setting. The story has many concerns for Marxist theory, the economic and social ideology of Karl Marx. According to Marx, workers are exploited by their capitalist bosses because they are not compensated for the full value of their labor. Marx also says that these workers would do well to unite with one another and revolt against their corrupt bosses. Unfortunately, cultural ideology, as well as the force of the State (the judiciary, the police, and the military) keeps them unconscious of the degree of their exploitation or otherwise prevents them from uniting and fighting for change. For Marx, an ideal society is one in which workers unite, fight against the capitalist class, and seize ownership of the means of production. The result would be a classless society in which all people, not just a privileged few, have a fair share of society's wealth. **In Melville's "Bartleby," capitalist ideology is demonstrated in many ways – through the behavior of the lawyer, the reactions of the other scriveners, and the style of the story's ending.**

Creating a Thesis for your Literary Analysis Paper

Initial Ideas

You will need to come up with ideas for your Literary Analysis Paper, and then a working thesis statement that relates to the focus idea you settle on. We'll come back to the working thesis statement shortly.

For now, let's stay on ideas.

I will use "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" as an example.

Come up with some themes of the story (broad, one-word themes), or really any aspect of the story you find interesting.

For example:

- 1) Love
- 2) Marriage
- 3) Friendship
- 4) Abusive Relationships
- 5) Masculinity
- 6) Women
- 7) Alcoholism / Drinking

(There could be a lot more, but I will stop there. Eventually, you will choose a focus based on your list, but you should start by brainstorming a list...)

The focus shouldn't just be "love" in general or "marriage" in general. Try not to say (or think) "My idea about the story is abusive relationships" or "My idea about the story is love."

Your thesis idea should be much more nuanced and specific, such as...(if you focus on Love)

- **Love** is something we all need, but it tends to limit us when it comes to personal achievements and autonomy.
- We all vie for love, but its fulfilling manifestation and experience is different for all people, especially in the 1980s.

Or, if you focus on abusive relationships:

- Unfortunately, masculinity for men in the 1980s was intertwined with control and domination, which sometimes manifested in **abusive relationships**.
- **Abusive relationships** can be subjective in that what one person finds oppressive and unbearable, another may find strangely comforting. This phenomenon may have been and continues to be gendered.

The same nuance applies to any one word or two-word "theme focus" you have. What are you saying about that thing? What do you think the story/the writer is saying about that thing?

There must be some nuance in your thesis statement so that there are concepts and points to develop in your argument.

Look at this example I just gave:

- **Abusive relationships** can be **subjective** in that what one person finds **oppressive and unbearable**, another may find **strangely comforting**. This phenomenon may have been and continue to be **gendered**.

Notice the words in red. They are aspects I can then seek to demonstrate as I make my argument.

Your nuanced idea will soon take the form of your thesis statement, which expresses your nuanced idea.

Thesis Statement

The thesis (statement) is very important because your thesis is the backbone of your paper. Though we've already covered the Introduction content, you would only be able to compose the thesis statement *after* you have established your thesis statement and possibly even already written the body of your paper.

Working Thesis (Statement)

It can be wise to not try to solidify your thesis statement until after you've written your body paragraphs, because what comes out in the process of writing sometimes shifts the nuance of your thesis statement. The process of writing is planning but also letting your thinking guide you as you write. Thus, having a "working thesis statement" (a thesis statement or a thesis that is your *general* direction) is wise in the beginning. Then, after you've written your body paragraphs, go back and re-work the thesis to match the direction in which your thoughts and insights went.

I've discussed how your thesis idea should be nuanced and specific, not just a one-word focus like "love" or "marriage" or "alcoholism." Before we get into what that should look like in a good, finalized thesis statement(s), let's consider some "weak" approaches.

Weak Thesis Statements:

- 1) **Too simplistic:** "One theme of the story is women." "An important theme of the story is masculinity." -- This is not a good approach because you want your thesis statement to be more complex than this, wherein you say something *about* the theme or aspect of the story you've chosen.
- 2) **Naming Three Themes (or aspects of the story):** "Carver's story delves into how women often allow mistreatment in relationships, the way ego in men is problematic, and how alcoholism can make relationships dysfunctional." (Usually, when students do this, they plan to talk about women in one paragraph, the male

ego in the next, and alcoholism in the third paragraph.) Do not take this approach because it is not a focused argument. *We are looking for a focused argument.*

- 3) Summarizing-the-story thesis statement: “Carver story explores how two couples sit around one night talking about love and their experiences in past relationships.”

This is not a good approach because you are not making an argument but just stating what occurs in the story.

Remember, all of those are *weak* approaches.

You want to make an argument.

Overturning common conceptions

Some writers take this approach for creating literary thesis statements: They consider what is “obvious” or a common conception about the story, and *then overturn that to argue it just the opposite way*. [You would then support your position (or take on the story) with details, examples, narrative from the text, quotes, etc. in the story...]

“Overturning” is just an idea. Your thesis idea doesn’t *have* to overturn previous or obvious ideas about the story, as long as it is nuanced and specific.

Strong Thesis Statements

Below are some examples of strong thesis statements that have a degree of “tension” in them [“Tension” means showing how your argument contrasts with another way of looking at X (some aspect of the story).]

Note: Be sure to use the author’s name in the thesis statement. As we said, a critical analysis of literature is your take on what *the author’s intent is* – (what the author is criticizing, what the author is making social commentary about, what the author means for the reader to get out of the story). Thus, using phrases like “Wharton is trying to show...” “Smith intends...” “Jackson assigns blame...” etc., is appropriate.

It is okay that we don’t know *for sure* what the author intends. A literary analysis is not meant to be an absolute and definite in terms of what the author’s intent is; it is meant to be *your take* on what the author’s intent is.

If you choose to focus on Mel and how the story reflects modern masculinity, your thesis statement may be as follows:

- “Though Carver frames Mel on the surface as a very likeable person, it is obvious he means to show the darker side of Mel – his misogyny toward women, a domineering personality, and vulnerability in relationships – as reflective of issues for modern men.”

This thesis statement is obviously focused on Mel (and will discuss three ways in which he is flawed), but it goes even further to tie in a characterization of Mel with a real-world social issue (modern men's problems/issues.) This sets you up to develop the body paragraphs more.

It is good when you can make a point about the story and tie it in with culture / society / human nature / real-life. This is what good literary analysis does. It shows how the story is interesting and meaningful in and of itself but takes it further to discuss how the story reveals or reflects some universal truth about life, culture, people, and humanity.

- “Terri is presented as a person who accepts either physical or verbal abuse in her relationships. However, Carver ultimately does not mean for her to be read as weak but strong. She is an enlightened, compassionate woman who has a greater understanding than most women of the male ego and how to deal with it.”

(With this thesis statement, you would be arguing for and pointing out different ways in which Terri is strong and empowered by her experiences with the men in her life and that her accepting them is a positive, not a negative.) Again, though you do not state it in the thesis statement, you make connections in the body paragraphs between her and women in “real life” and modern issues for women.

- “Carver had a lifelong problem with alcoholism. Yet his story seems to glamorize social drinking and alcoholism, showing how it facilitates friendship bonding, makes people more deep and philosophical, and brings out refreshing brutal honesty.”

-

In this thesis, your focus is on drinking and alcoholism, and your argument is that Carver *glamorizes* it. As we said, arguments often boil down to saying something is a good thing or a bad thing. With literary analysis, you are saying that the author is framing something as a good thing or a bad thing. You do not necessarily use those words, but it is often what you are doing. Then, in your paper, you argue for how one can read the author's presentation of X, Y, or Z aspects of the story as either positive or negative.

Body Paragraph(s) for Literary Analysis Paper

Next, we will discuss body paragraph ideas. When starting a literary analysis paper, you should always start with a working thesis. You may change later, but you must have an idea of your argument, then brainstorm aspects of the story to support your argument. This would be content for the body paragraphs.

Number of Body Paragraphs

You should have three body paragraphs that convey your three supporting points for your thesis statement.

If your thesis is about Mel being a flawed person, these might be your three support points (each would be developed in its own paragraph).

- 1) He is misogynistic toward women in his life.
- 2) He is socially domineering (does all the talking in social situations, seems to be egotistical among friends, seems to need to be the center of attention, seems to disavow others' ideas while centering his own as most valid and important)
- 3) He is emotionally vulnerable and confused. Though he is the one who acts the most "deep" about love, he is clueless about love and very vulnerable, as indicated when he says in the story that he wishes he could come back as a knight because "they didn't get hurt in all that armor." (It's figurative language; his way of saying "I'm vulnerable and wish I would stop feeling hurt/pain in relationships.")

Body Paragraph format:

This (below) is how you would develop a body paragraph, keeping in mind that the original thesis statement is along the lines of Carver (the writer) showing the "dark side" of Mel and how this is reflective of modern male issues.

- 1) Make a point about the story that relates to your thesis statement. Point out something in the story. (This may be 1 to 3 sentence(s).

"One way in which Mel is flawed is his misogynistic attitude toward the women in his life. This is shown in his behavior and attitude toward both his present wife, Terri, and his ex-wife, Marjorie."

- 2) Give a textual example (either by quoting or by referencing a specific part of the text)

Mel is condescending toward his wife, Terri. At one point, he says to her, when she is trying to speak her mind, 'Would you please just shut up for once in your life?' He also disavows her feelings toward her ex, saying 'If that's love, you can have it.' Finally, he flirts with Laura, Nick's new girlfriend, right in front of his wife. He is either aggressive or passive-aggressive toward her. His attitude toward his ex-wife is hardly any better. He often mentions hating her and even goes so far as to say that he wouldn't mind letting loose a bunch of bees on her one day.

- 3) Explain the *significance* of what you pointed out. How does it work to reinforce the overall argument you made in your thesis statement? How does it make a statement about real-life, culture, contemporary society? What does it show as a possible universal idea? What might have the author been trying to say or what meaning might he/she have been trying to convey by crafting the action/characters/dialogue in that way? Is the writer framing this as a good thing or a bad thing and how can we tell from the text? What impression is given to the reader?

(Remember that in the analysis, the goal is to evaluate in a way that is insightful and delves deeply. You do not want to say the things that are too obvious to the reader just by reading the story itself. Also, remember to use wording such as “Carver is trying to show...” “Carver critiques...” “Carver intends for the reader to see...” “Carver paints a picture of...”)

“Carver renders a complex profile of Mel since he is both likeable *and* clearly ridden with issues. The reader may have mixed feelings. On the one hand, Mel clearly does his duties for women. In the case of Terri, he looked after her when she was in a frightening situation with her ex, Ed. With Marjorie, he dutifully pays her alimony to care for their kids. However, Mel’s underlying feelings toward these women are bitter and cold. In many ways, Mel represents modern males’ resentment, in various contexts, of women. Mel cares for his wife but seems to resent her past relationship with Ed. Though the relationship was dysfunctional by most people’s standards and Terri is not “still in love,” Mel feels insecure that Terri has a past with a man for whom she still has feelings and sympathy. This ties in with the way modern men feel resentful of women’s easier access to dating prospects and position as the ‘sought after’ sex in dating. Mel also resents that he does not feel the same connection with his ex-wife as Terri feels with her ex-boyfriend. Likewise, his resentment of Terri and her past relationship speaks to pressures men feel to be the hero in the lives of the women they are involved with. Terri having feelings of affection for her ex means, to Mel, that there is that much less hero-worship *of him*. The same holds true with his ex-wife, Marjorie, who also has a new boyfriend that Mel detests. In essence, he does not feel hostile toward the women because he hates them, but because he loves them and wishes he were more central to them, and they were more within his emotional control. Carver is not saying Mel is a bad person, but he does illustrate men’s socialization to be heroes, winners, and authorities. When this fails sometimes, they often feel disappointed and angry.

All three colors above should be in the same paragraph!

The analysis (#3) should be longer than 1 & 2 in the body paragraph. In the example above, I may have gone a bit too long in the analysis, but I am trying to give you a sense of how to approach it. You must reinforce your thesis statement about how Mel is flawed in a way that represents modern male issues.

This basic format should be completed for each of your three body paragraphs, using whatever claim, examples from text, and analysis that is relevant to the thesis statement (argument) you decide on.

Example Body Paragraph Development

Thesis Statement: Though Carver's history was fraught with alcoholism as a lifelong personal demon, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" glorifies drinking, showing its positive social effects, how it encourages personal reflection/revelation, and how it results in rawness and honesty, all of which create value in our lives.

Major Points in Support:

- The friends bond through drinking
- Mel's drinking causes him to think heavily on serious matters (people become deep and philosophical)
- Mel's "realness" emerges -- increasing bitterness/anger comes out (but it is at least honest)

Red = Claim

Blue = Textual References

Green = Analysis

Point one:

Friendship bonding through drinking is featured at the beginning of the story. The scene is set with four friends convened at a kitchen table, sharing a bottle of gin and talking about love. Nick's narration states that "the gin and the tonic water kept going around, and we somehow got on the subject of love" (187). The reader is aware of how much drinking is a part of their evening, as there are frequent mentions of it: "he finished his drink," "she raised her glass and drank from it," "Mel handed me the saucer of limes. I took a section, squeezed it over my drink, and stirred the ice cubes with my finger," "Laura leaned forward with her glass in both hands" (187-188). Although drinking is often considered a problem or a weakness, and is sometimes associated with the lower classes, Carver glamorizes it by having a sophisticated set of people indulging while socializing. Mel jokes that he has "no education," but as a medical doctor, he is more educated than the average person. While the reader does not have detailed information about other characters' professional background, there is cursory mention of Laura as a legal secretary who Nick met in a professional capacity; hence, it is probable that Nick is a lawyer. Carver's portrayal of white-collar drinkers – including their occasional drunken palaver, with a boisterous man and a verbose woman – is reminiscent, in a more subdued way, of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* milieu. Another way Carver glorifies drinking is by portraying the characters as loving and sentimental as they drink. Just after Terri asks Mel with great concern if he is drunk, he reminds her that he is not on call that day. The friends proceed to say to Mel, "We love you," to which he replies, "Love you too, Laura. And you, Nick, love you too. You know something? You guys are our pals" (191). In this way, Carver shows how drinking brings

people together. When friends drink together, a protective streak often surfaces. Knowing the friend is not completely in physical control and may be experiencing intense thoughts and feelings also provokes affection.

Conclusion of Literary Analysis Paper

The conclusion should not be too long. Roughly six to eight complete sentences is appropriate.

Consider these questions when crafting a conclusion:

Ultimately, why (in your estimation) did the author write this story? What new perspectives do readers gain from it? Why is it important that this story be read? How does society / our culture stand to benefit from exploring and understanding the surface story and its complexities? How do we stand to be harmed if we don't explore or understand the surface story and its complexities? In what way does the story relate to people's lives and the culture in which we live?

This approach is also good:

Aim to summarize your main points and echo your thesis (in different words) in a way that reinforces the significance of your argument. Here are some key elements to include:

- **Echo the thesis statement:** Begin your conclusion by revisiting the thesis statement from your introduction. However, avoid simply copying and pasting it word for word. Instead, rephrase it to remind the reader of your main argument.
- **Summarize main points:** Briefly recap the key points you made in your analysis. Highlight the evidence you presented to support your thesis and how it relates to the overall interpretation of the literary work.
- **Provide closure:** Offer some final thoughts that wrap up your analysis. This could involve reflecting on the broader implications of your argument or considering how the themes or characters you discussed contribute to the work as a whole.
- **Connect back to the introduction:** Consider circling back to a motif or idea introduced in your introduction to provide a sense of closure and coherence to your paper.
- **Leave a lasting impression:** End your conclusion with a memorable sentence or thought-provoking idea that leaves the reader thinking about the significance of your analysis.

Remember, the conclusion is your final opportunity to make a strong impression on your reader and leave them with a clear understanding of your interpretation of the literary work. Make sure your conclusion reinforces the main points of your analysis and leaves a lasting impact.

Sources & Works Cited

Your paper should cite the story you're focusing on and analyzing. Citing means in-text citation and an entry on the Work(s) Cited page. However, you must use *one other source* to support one of your analytical points. Third and fourth sources are optional. Don't go over four sources (including the main source [your story]).