

Several Techniques for Writing a Literature Essay

Use your own gut reactions

- Reading requires *collaboration* between writer and reader. Remember that your response is *part* of the literature.
- Start by listing your thoughts on the literary work. Freewrite your impressions and observations.
- What emotions did the literature make you feel?
- What did you think about *after* reading it?
- How would you behave if you were in the same situation as the main character?
- Remember that you **MUST** support your gut reactions with **evidence** from the work.

Explain the author's intentions

Do some research into the author's biography, using it to understand the literature. (Remembering, of course, that a literary work does not automatically reflect an author's life).

Explicate (do a close reading) of the work, using the following categories:

Theme: Look for the “message” in the text, but don't just settle for the first idea you see. Make a list of possible themes.

Conflict: List the forces in tension in the work and then fill them out with examples or evidence from the story. (Draw a conclusion about the conflict and you have a Thesis).

Character: Ask yourself, what *consistent* qualities does a character have?

What motivates the character?

What complexities does the character show?

Does the character change, and how?

What realization(s) does the protagonist have?

Who is the antagonist, and why?

Images: (Language that appeals to your 5 senses). Scan the work, listing images, searching for patterns and repetitions. Write down page references and your first impressions.

Form/Style: Read the literature for its word choice, or tone/mood (what can be called the writer's attitude towards the subject), and ask yourself, *why* has s/he done it this way?

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