

The Writing Center

at
Trident Technical College

ANALYZING TEXTS

When you analyze a text, you consider the parts of the text and how those parts work together as a whole. Don't be afraid to highlight, underline, take notes on the book or in a notebook. The more you work at understanding the text, the easier it will be to discuss it or to use it in a paper.

Nonfiction

In writing that is fact-based such as biography or history, consider:

- What is the thesis and/or message of the essay? Who is the intended audience?
- What are the main points of the text? Main points support the thesis.
- What type of specific details such as factual material, data and statistics, are used to support the major points? Is this information accurate and up to date?
- Are there any references to other texts, people, places, or historical events that help place emphasis on the author's point? What are they? How do these references help you understand the text?
- Don't expect to agree with everything an author writes. If you disagree, make sure you have valid reasons for disagreeing and ways to support your claim.

Fiction

In creative works, especially short stories and novels, it is important to consider what role these elements play in the story: characters, setting, theme, plot, point of view.

- Characters are the people or things who act in the story.
- Setting is where the action takes place. It can mean the era, the location or the atmosphere in which the characters act their roles.
- Theme describes the broad idea(s) within the story. Stories can have several themes which sometimes pull the characters in different directions and create tension. Perhaps the characters are concerned with class distinctions, justice, or their own legacy.
- The plot is the story line. This is where tension and challenges are introduced, developed and resolved.

- Who is the narrator of the story? Is the narrator one of the characters and the story is told in first person point of view? Or is the narrator placed outside the action so the story is told in third person?

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CHARACTER ANALYSIS

A character analysis is the process of evaluating the specific traits of a literary character, including elements such as the role they play and the various conflicts they experience. The key to analyzing a character is to understand him/her as best you can. It is useful for both fiction and nonfiction when taking a closer look at the text.

- First, decide what makes your character interesting enough to serve as the focus of your paper? Set out the major points you would like to make about your character.
- What shapes your character's behavior? Consider things like their language, attitude or background. What else influences your character?
- Does your character change during the story? If so, what changes him/her? Or, conversely, why does he/she fail to change?
- What effect does this character have on others? Imagine the story without this character. Would the story change much if this character was not in it?
- Does the era or setting in which the character lives have any effect on his actions?
- Look for contrasts and comparisons. When you can, make a chart that shows these similarities and differences.
- Is there anything unusual or unique about the text?