**Guide to Before beginning to Write a Literary Analysis Paper**

How to Create a Literary Analysis:

1.Read the text closely several times. Focus on the ideas that are being presented. Think about the characters’ development and the author’s writing technique. What might be considered interesting, unusual, or important? **REMEMBER TO DO ANNOTATIONS!**

2.Brainstorm a list of potential topics. Highlight important passages in the text and take notes on these passages. Later, when writing the paper, these notes should help a writer to remember which aspects of the story caught his/her attention. The topic chosen should always be based on a writer’s interpretation of the author’s message. Here are some things a writer may want to consider when brainstorming for a literary analysis.

ϖ**Plot**: PLEASE AVOID PLOT AS LITERARY ELEMENT (because you will probably spend 3-4 sentences summarizing the plot as part of your introduction anyway!)

ϖ**Character**: What observations might a writer make about the characters? Are there discrepancies in what they think, say, or do? Are the observations a writer makes different from what other characters say? How does the author describe the characters? Are the characters “dynamic” (a dynamic character is a character that undergoes important changes throughout the work)? Are the characters “static” characters (a static character is a character that stays the same throughout the work)? Are the characters “flat” characters (a flat character is a character that does not have vivid character traits) or “round” characters (a round character is a character that has vivid character traits)? Are the characters symbolic or representative of some universal quality? Is it possible that two characters in the text might be compared or contrasted?

ϖ**Setting**: Is there a relationship between the work’s setting and its mood? Does the setting reflect the work’s theme? How does the setting impact the characters? Does a change in the setting affect the mood, characters, or conflict?

ϖ**Theme**: What is the major idea or theme of the work? How does the author relay this theme? Is there a greater meaning to the details given? How do the characters’ moods affect the theme? What allusions are made throughout the work? Are there repeating patterns or symbols? What does the title say about the theme?

ϖ**Style/Imagery/Metaphor/Simile/Symbolism**: In what way might a specific image or series of images be analyzed? How might the development of images throughout the work be explained? Are the images important to the meaning of the work? How are images interrelated with other literary elements? Is there a particular object that repeats itself enough to draw importance to it (this is probably a symbol that represents something)?

ϖ**Tone**: How might the attitude of the author or the tone of the work be described? Is the tone serious, playful, casual, formal, or somber? How about ironic? How does the author achieve this tone? How does the tone impact the author’s message? Does the author say one thing but mean another? Does the author take the subject seriously or treat it lightly?

3.Think about what the author is trying to say. **Why** is this important? What points might a writer make?”

4.Write a working thesis. The analysis will need a strong thesis that states a writer’s perspective but also allows it to be debated. The thesis should state a writer’s opinion, but it should also allow readers to arrive at their own conclusions.

ϖExample of a debatable thesis:

**Pride and Prejudice is about Elizabeth Bennet’s effort to overcome her own proud behavior and discrimination towards Mr. Darcy, as well as how her family is affected by the haughtiness and preconceptions of the society around them.**

(This is a debatable thesis because it asks the reader, “Does Elizabeth actually exhibit haughtiness and preconceptions? Is this why she doesn’t get along with Mr. Darcy? How is Elizabeth’s family affected by the haughtiness and preconceptions of the society around them?”)

ϖAvoid a non-debatable thesis:

Pride and Prejudice is about five sisters and their journey to find love.

(This thesis is non-debatable because it is undisputable. The paper is framed as a summary rather than as a literary analysis.)

6.Make an extended list of evidence. Find more evidence from the text to support the working thesis. Then select the evidence that will be used in the paper.

7.Look for supporting evidence from other authors/writers who are talking about your assigned story. What do they say? Does it fit with your thesis? This is called secondary sources. You should have at least two.

ϖHave quotation marks been used around direct quotations?

ϖHave the sources been cited correctly according to MLA style?

ϖHave clear transitions been used between sentences and paragraphs?

8.Proofread. Here is a trick to try—read your rough draft out loud. Listening to your words will help you to catch errors. Also, you can read it backwards sentence by sentence starting at the last sentence, then the second to last sentence and move your way up your essay to look for errors.