

National 5
Critical Essays

Purpose of the Critical Essay

- A DISCURSIVE essay on a text
- Presenting an ARGUMENT – clear line of thought which is linked throughout and is fully developed.
- You are the EXPERT on the text. Assertive stance which your genuine personal response/interpretation of the text
- Must have a CLEAR FOCUS and fully address the task – not everything you know or can remember about the text.

Features of a Critical Essay

- Don't forget that you are presenting an ARGUMENT so you will use the same techniques as in discursive writing:
 - Introduction which clearly introduces line of argument.
 - Clearly and fully explained points.
 - Justification using evidence (textual evidence such as quotations) and explanation.
 - Clear structure which helps develop argument – topic sentences, sub-conclusions, linking, transitional markers.
 - Conclusion which sums up argument.

Assessment of a Critical Essay

- **UNDERSTANDING**

- **ANALYSIS**

- **EVALUATION**

UNDERSTANDING

Display an **UNDERSTANDING** of WHAT the text is about.

- THIS INCLUDES:**
- **WHAT** happens in the text (Storyline, Key Plot Events)
 - **WHAT** the text is about (**THEMES** and Writer's **PURPOSE** – what are they saying about the themes, what are the messages to the reader about the Human Condition)

ANALYSIS

Identify and **ANALYSE HOW** the writer achieves certain effects and their overall **PURPOSE**.

THIS INCLUDES:

- Identifying **TECHNIQUES** the writer uses and explaining their effects.
- Selecting key quotations and textual evidence and explaining why they are important in the text – what is their effect, what do they show?

EVALUATION

EVALUATE HOW EFFECTIVE the techniques used by the writer help them to achieve their intended effect and overall purpose.

THIS INCLUDES:

- Assessing the effectiveness of the techniques and the text as a whole and giving a genuine personal response.
- Using evaluative language: successfully, clearly, cleverly, is effective in...

Even though you must give a personal response, remember that it is a formal essay so you should not write 'I think...' Use 'we think' or 'the reader thinks'.

The Two Parts to the Task

Open question, text can fit any of these

Choose appropriate text

Type of text

Choose a novel or a short story in which you feel there is an incident of great importance to the story as a whole.

This part ONLY helps you select the text you are going to write about.

Describe the incident and go on to show its importance to the development of the characters and the central concerns of the text.

Show your understanding

Identify the theme

This part tells you what your essay must do/cover. This is the bit you must refer to at all times in your essay.

The Analysis

The Critical Essay Structure

INTRODUCTION

The function of the introduction is to clearly introduce the topic of the essay and set up the line of argument.

KEY COMPONENTS:

- Title of the text
- Type of text
- Author/Poet/Dramatist's Name
- Introduce focus of essay (the line of argument) – do this by referring to the task
- Outline key points of argument – areas the essay will cover

Lead into Argument

Depending on the style of task, you may wish to give a little detail about the text in order to lead into your main analysis

This should not be a full blown plot summary but should clearly concerned with the main focus of the task and argument.

DO NOT retell the story at any point in your essay, only explain parts of the plot that are essential to the point you are making about the writer's technique.
(avoid storytelling without any clear point of analysis)

Main Argument

You should **ALWAYS** clearly plan out the aspects of the text that you are going to deal with in the main argument before you start writing. Your argument needs to be clear, logical and well thought through.

Consider:

- What is relevant to the task
- The key points you want to make in each section
- Which quotations or textual evidence are you going to use to illustrate your points.
- The appropriate order of the points/paragraphs
- How you are going to link the points/paragraphs together.

Basic Structure of Paragraphs of Analysis

- **Topic Sentence** – introduces topic of paragraph. Should be clearly focussed on argument and task
- **Textual Evidence** – illustrate point made by referring to text (quotation)
- **Analysis** – Full and thorough explanation of effect achieved and purpose of technique's effect.
- **Sub-Conclusion** – Bringing together all points from paragraph in order to re-focus on argument/task and link into next paragraph.

Conclusion

The conclusion should bring the essay to a close and sum-up the argument in an assertive, clear and concise way.

The conclusion is very similar to the introduction in some ways:

- Re-state Title, Type and author of text
- Clear reference to the task
- Re-assert argument with particular focus on task and overall purpose of the text (Evaluative stance)

*There should be **NO** new points of analysis or any quotations in the conclusion*