

ESSAY 1

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Write a 800–1,200 word (3–5 page) essay on *Dracula* that analyzes how the novel employs one of the aspects of literary expression explored by Robert Alter in *The Pleasures of Reading*: style, allusion, structure, or perspective. Base your analysis on your own close, careful reading of *Dracula*.

Critical Analysis

Begin your essay with a critical question about how your chosen literary element works in *Dracula*. Your critical question should ask how some aspect of style, allusion, structure, or perspective functions in the novel. A good critical question should be interesting, problematic, and significant; it should have more than one plausible answer, and it should offer readers new insights into the story.

Thesis

Your thesis is the answer to the critical question you've posed; it is a central claim you intend to prove or demonstrate. A good thesis is neither so bizarre that you can't defend it ("The letters and journals in *Dracula* were actually all written by Renfield, thus the novel is merely a record of his paranoid fantasies and delusions.") nor so boring that no one could possibly disagree with it ("The epistolary format of *Dracula* presents events from different points of view.")

Evidence

To make the insights articulated in your thesis powerful and convincing, you must support them with concrete evidence. Back up every point you make in your critical analysis with specific references to the text of the novel. Spend most of your time in your essay closely reading and analyzing portions of the text to show how they support your thesis. You should also use evidence from the text to address any likely reader objections to your thesis.

Structure

The structure of a good college essay depends primarily upon its thesis statement. A well-structured essay presents an explicit thesis early on that forecasts the essay's structure. Every element of the essay helps support and develop that thesis. The Introduction engages the reader's interest in the issue the thesis raises. Each paragraph in the Body of the essay develops and supports a single point that helps confirm the thesis. Begin each body paragraph with a one-sentence statement of the paragraph's main point: a Topic Sentence. The Conclusion restates the essay's thesis and summarizes its argument. In a well-structured essay, a reader could read just your thesis and your topic sentences and have a perfectly comprehensible outline of your essay.

Style

Make your prose as clear and concise as possible. Don't waste time (yours or mine) trying to sound impressive. Write, instead, in a conversational voice: the clear, plainspoken, engaging voice of a person talking about a subject they find interesting. Don't let your essay run longer than what you have to say. One sentence that actually says something is better than a paragraph that doesn't. Make every word count.

Audience

Think of the audience for your essay as an individual, not a vaguely defined group of people. Imagine a single reader just as intelligent and well-informed as yourself, someone who has read *Dracula* and expects your essay to provide them with new, surprising insights about it. Note that such a reader would find plot summary or definitions of common literary terms unnecessary, tedious, and perhaps even a little insulting.

Drafts

I encourage you to write a draft of your essay as soon as possible. Your first draft — like all first drafts — will be awful, but don't worry: it's awfulness will help you see how to make the next draft better. You do not have to submit a rough draft to me, but if you want me to read and respond to your work in progress, I will gladly do so. Your work in progress might not be a full rough draft; you can show me partial drafts, outlines, sample paragraphs, a provisional thesis statement, and so on. You can send your work in progress to me as an email attachment or give me a hard copy of it in class. You may submit your work in progress for my feedback anytime before the Draft Deadline: Friday, September 23.

Quotations

Use quotations from the novel to direct the reader's attention to passages that help support your thesis. Never quote from the text without discussing what you're quoting and explaining how the quotation helps support your analysis. Your essay must employ in-text citations and parenthetical references with page numbers and have a Works Cited page with full bibliographic information on all the texts you quote from. Use proper MLA style for formatting your document.

See drmarkwomack.com/mla-style/: "Document Format," "Anatomy of a Citation," "How to Quote Prose," and "Documenting Sources."

Proofreading

Before you submit your essay for a grade, proofread it carefully and thoroughly, correcting any errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and MLA formatting. Slapdash spelling, sloppy punctuation, semiliterate grammar, or slipshod MLA formatting seriously undermines your credibility as a writer.

Therefore, essays with excessive errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, or MLA formatting will receive no higher than a D.

If you need to know how to spell a word, look it up in a dictionary. Do *not* trust a computer to proof your spelling. Spell-checkers tell you whether you've spelled a word correctly, but they can't tell whether you've used the correct word. (For example: "They proofread there essays carefully" contains a misspelling.) If you have questions about grammar, punctuation, or MLA format, consult a good writing handbook or ask your instructor.

Evaluation

In evaluating your essay, I will focus on the originality and insightfulness of your thesis, the precision of your analysis, and the clarity of your prose. (See the "Grading Criteria for Major Essays" on the Syllabus.)

Submit your essay through the TurnItIn link on the class Blackboard page labeled "Essay 1: Critical Analysis."

DUE DATES:

- **DRAFT DEADLINE: September 23**
- **FINAL DRAFT DUE: October 7***

* I will accept any excuse you give for handing your essay in late, no matter how improbable; however, late papers get no written comments from me, and I won't accept any papers submitted later than one week past the due date.