

Essay 1 – Short Story Analysis

Write a two-to-three-page (500-800 words) critical analysis of ONE of the following short stories:

“Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” by Joyce Carol Oates

“Cathedral” by Raymond Carver

Critical Analysis To analyze your chosen short story, you must first pose a good critical question about it. Your critical question should ask how a particular literary element in the story works, how some aspect of plot, character, setting, or point of view enhances the story. 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. Your **Short Story Journals** will help you develop a strong critical question for your essay.

Thesis Your paper must have a thesis. The thesis is your answer to the critical question you pose; it is a central claim you intend to prove or demonstrate. A good thesis is neither so *bizarre* that you can’t defend it (“In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck is actually Jim’s imaginary friend, a subconscious projection of the runaway slave’s mind.”) nor so *boring* that no one could possibly disagree with it (“The first-person point of view in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* helps readers understand what Huck is thinking.”).

Evidence Support every point you make in your essay with specific evidence from the text; with very few exceptions, that evidence will consist of direct quotations from the story and your analysis of them. Use your evidence to back up your thesis in two ways. First, and most importantly, you should closely read and analyze portions of the text to show how they support your thesis. Second, you should address likely reader objections to your thesis.

Structure The structure of a good college essay depends entirely on 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 critical question the thesis addresses. Each paragraph in the Body of the essay develops and supports a single point that helps confirm the thesis. (Body paragraphs always begin with a one-sentence statement of the paragraph’s main point: its 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.

Structure of Short Story Analysis	
<p>Introduction (1 paragraph)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hooks the reader’s interest. ▶ Introduces the critical question your essay will address. ▶ Ends with a thesis statement (your answer to the question).
<p>Alternate Views (1 paragraph)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Presents possible alternative answers to your critical question. ▶ Briefly responds to alternative answers.
<p>Analysis (2-3 paragraphs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Supports each element of your thesis with a close, careful, and detailed reading of the story.
<p>Conclusion (1 paragraph)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Briefly summarizes your analysis. ▶ Returns to the “hook” from the opening paragraph.

Style Make your prose as clear and concise as possible. Don’t waste your time (and 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. Make every word count. One sentence that has something to say is better than a paragraph that doesn’t.

Quotations Use quotations from the story to direct the reader’s attention to passages that help support your thesis. Never quote from the story without discussing what you’re quoting and explaining how the quotation helps support your argument. Although your only source for this essay will be the text of your chosen story (anthologized in *Portable Legacies*) your essay must have a Work Cited page with full bibliographic information on the text and employ in-text citations and parenthetical references with page numbers. Use proper MLA style for formatting your document. (See <drmarkwomack.com/mla-style/>, especially “Document Format,” “Anatomy of a Citation,” and “How to Quote Prose.”)

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 the story you’re analyzing and expects your essay to provide new, surprising insights into that story. Such a reader would, of course, find plot summary or definitions of common literary terms unnecessary, tedious, and perhaps even a little insulting.

Drafts You will develop your essay through multiple drafts. The Story Journals will help you develop a good critical question and a working thesis. Once you have a working thesis, you can make an informal outline for your essay. (We’ll workshop the outlines in class on **February 4**.) Your outline will help you write a First Draft. Your First Draft will suck big-time (all first drafts do), but its awfulness will show you what you need to work on to make the next draft(s) better. On **February 8**, your fellow students will assist you in a Peer Review workshop by pointing out just where your draft needs improvement. You will turn in your Final Revision on **February 18**.

Optional Revision Conferences I will hold optional 10-minute revision conferences with interested students on **February 15** in CASA 325. Conferences with me on rough drafts of your essay are truly *optional*. The conferences are for students who want extra help revising their essays, not for students trying to impress their instructor or earn brownie points. If you don't have specific questions about your draft, don't sign up for a conference. If you do sign up for a conference, show up on time, bring your First Draft, and be ready to tell me about your thesis and how your essay defends it. I, in turn, will point out any major problems I see in your draft and tell you what I think you need to focus on as you revise it.

Proofreading Before you submit the Final Revision, proofread your essay 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—your *ethos*, in rhetorical terms. **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 Writer's Reference* or ask your instructor.

Evaluation In evaluating your essay, I will consider each of the following: your essay's thesis, its structure, its use of evidence, and its prose style. (See the "Grading Criteria for Critical Essays" on the Syllabus.)

Schedule for Essay 1 – Short Story Analysis		
Outline Workshop	February 4	Short Story Journal 4 (including your Critical Question and your Informal Outline).
Peer Review Workshop	February 8	THREE copies of your First Draft.
Revision Workshop	February 11	Return Completed Peer Reviews.
Revision Conferences	February 15	No class. (Optional Revision Conferences in CASA 325.)
Final Revision Due	February 18	Revised Draft, First Draft, all the Peer Reviews you received, and all your Short Story Journals (in a two-pocket folder with your name on the front cover).