Setting

Setting is the time and place (or when and where) of the story. It's a literary element of literature used in novels, short stories, plays, films, etc., and usually introduced during the exposition (beginning) of the story, along with the characters. The setting may also include the environment of the story, which can be made up of the physical location, climate, weather, or social and cultural surroundings.

There are various ways that time and place indicate setting. Time can cover many areas, such as the character's time of life, the time of day, time of year, time period such as the past, present, or future, etc. Place also covers a lot of areas, such as a certain building, room in a building, country, city, beach, in a mode of transport such as a car, bus, boat, indoors or out, etc. The setting of a story can change throughout the plot. The environment includes geographical location such as beach or mountains, the climate and weather, and the social or cultural aspects such as a school, theatre, meeting, club, etc.

II. Examples of Setting

Example 1

A simple example to understand setting is the Disney movie "Cinderella." The setting starts out as

Time: *Cinderella as a young girl, long ago in the past*

Place: *Cinderella's home in a kingdom far away*

After her father dies, the time aspect of setting changes, skipping roughly ten years into the future. Understanding this change in time helps in keeping up with the story.

Time: *Cinderella as a young woman, long ago in the past*

Place: *Cinderella's home in a kingdom, in her bedroom and in the kitchen*

Example 2

Read this example below to see how setting is written into a story.

As the sun set in the evening sky, Malcolm slowly turned and walked toward his home. All was silent and still. Through the window, he could see his older brother James watching a football game on the TV. James was home from his first year of college in the city. It was lonely at times, but Malcolm felt it was rather nice to not be in James' shadow during his senior year of high school.

Time: *evening, senior year of high school, and modern times (they have a TV)*
Place: *Malcolm's home, and possibly the suburbs or country (his brother has gone to the city for school).*

III. Types of Setting

There are two types of setting, each having its own purpose.

a. Backdrop setting

Have you ever read a story, but found it difficult to figure out what time period in which the story was written or where it is? The story probably had a backdrop setting. The story is timeless and can happen at any point in history or anywhere. The focus is on the lesson or message being delivered. Many fairy tales and children's stories have backdrop settings. "Winnie the Pooh" would be an example. Since the lessons that the characters learn is the point rather than the time period, it's hard to tack a "past, present, or future" on the time aspect of the setting. It could also be any town or country, which means children anywhere can relate to it.

b. Integral setting

With an integral setting (integral means to be a part of or important to), the time and place are important to the story. For example, a story dealing with a historical setting will have a direct impact on the plot. A story that happens in the 1800s will not have technology, so the characters will have to write a letter, ride a horse or take a carriage to visit each other; they cannot travel long distances in one day as we do now with cars, buses, and planes. This will have a direct impact on the events of the story, especially if there is distance involved.

IV. The Importance of Setting

Setting gives context to the characters' actions in a story line. It can also create the mood (how the reader or viewer feels). It's easier to understand why the characters in the story are doing what they're doing when we know where the they are. The

time of day, time of year, and ages of the characters will also affect how they act and what they say.

All forms of literature will have some form of setting; even backdrop settings have an age range of the characters, which is part of time, and a location, either indoors or out, for example. Without a setting, readers and viewers cannot follow a story plot.

V. Examples of Setting in Literature

All good literature uses setting. No story can exist without an element of time or place. Here are some popular examples.

Example 1

Elie Wiesel wrote “Night” in the 1950s, but his biography has been read by millions through the decades and is still a popular book in schools. It’s the true and tragic account of Wiesel’s Jewish family during the Holocaust of World War II.

> ***AND THEN, one day all foreign Jews were expelled from Sighet. And Moishe the Beadle was a foreigner. Crammed into cattle cars by the Hungarian police, they cried silently. Standing on the station platform, we too were crying.***
> ***The train disappeared over the horizon; all that was left was thick, dirty smoke.***
> ***Behind me, someone said, sighing, ‘What do you expect?***
> ***That’s w a r… (Wiesel 1958).***

In this passage, we have the name of the town and a location within the town (place). We know that it’s a war (time). Since we know Wiesel survived World War II, we know it must be in the 1940s (time). The description of human beings “crammed into cattle cars” creates a mood of sympathy that such a place could be used for people.

Example 2

This next example is from J. K. Rowling’s book “Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.” Rowling’s series of Harry Potter books are popular with young adults and have been made into films.

> ***October arrived, spreading a damp chill over the grounds and into the castle. Madam Pomfrey, the nurse, was kept busy by a sudden spate of colds among the staff and students. Her Pepperup potion worked instantly, though it left the drinker smoking at the ears for several hours afterward. Ginny Weasley, who had been looking pale, was bullied into taking some by Percy. The steam pouring from under her vivid hair gave the impression that her whole head was on fire (Rowling 1999).***

This excerpt sets a gloomy mood with its setting, particularly with the words “damp chill.” It’s October and the characters are students, so we assume young (time). They are in a school dormitory, which is a castle (place). Since the season is fall, we know that the students are getting sick because of the cold. The idea that they are using a “potion” hints that the time period is long ago in the past or some fantasy time period.

VI. Examples of Setting in Pop Culture

Example 1

One area of pop culture that relies heavily on strong settings is the video game industry. The YouTube video below illustrates the importance of setting in games. As computer technology has improved over the years, video games have progressed from boring, simple games to intense and complex gaming experiences all due to the use of setting. Video games now have realistic backgrounds, whereas the first video games (as far back as the 1950s) had blank or static (unchanging) backgrounds. There are popular games designed in all time periods – past, present, and future – and in all areas of the world, including underwater and in outer space, as well as fantasy worlds.

Example 2

A second example of setting within pop culture is *Game of Thrones* by George R. R. Martin. This is a novel that’s been made into a successful series. Setting is a large basis of the story. The video below shows intro to the series, which starts out with a

map of the kingdom, an indication that setting will play an important part in the story.

To help readers understand the place of setting, Martin has a map in the front of the book so that they can see the location of plot events as the story unfolds. Viewers watching the series are able to see the settings change by following the scenes. Some settings are in castles, others in war camps. These different places of the setting will affect how the characters act. Characters in the castle are able to move about freely, may have servants doing things for them (or they are the servants doing for others), and can dress for comfort. However, the characters in the war camps have to move carefully, do things for themselves, and must dress for safety from instruments of war, such as swords. It's clear that time and place move the plot along.

Example 3

This video illustrates how both time and place of setting must be clear in understanding the story. The aliens try to find the setting in a story, but forgot one aspect.

VII. Related Terms

Environment

Environment is the physical location. It includes conditions such as the geographical properties (water, sand, mountains, etc.), the cultural and social settings (school, place of worship, community, business, museum, theatre, etc.), and weather or climate (storm, rain, sunshine, desert, mountain range, plains, etc.). Most times, environment plays a large part in the setting of any story.

VIII.Conclusion

Setting is an important literary device that is often taken for granted or easily misunderstood. Creating clear depictions of time and place in a story creates mood and moves the story along. Without setting, the plot line would be confusing and boring. A key element of a strong setting is using descriptive details, pulling on the reader's senses.

Setting Definition

What is setting? Here's a quick and simple definition:

> Setting is *where* and *when* a story or scene takes place. The *where* can be a real place like the city of New York, or it can be an imagined location, like Middle Earth in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings.* Similarly, the *when* can be a real time period (past or present) or imagined (the future). Other aspects that determine a setting include landscape, architecture, time of day, social context, and weather. For example, the setting of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is the upper-middle class countryside of 19th century England, while the setting of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* is a park bench in New York's Central Park.

Some additional key details about setting:

- Setting is sometimes also called "the scene" or "sense of place."
- Far from being just a "backdrop" for the story, the setting of a piece of literature often shapes the story's main events and motivates the characters to act as they do.
- Many works of literature have multiple settings—whether that means moving between the interior and exterior of the same house, different countries, or different centuries. It is important to note how plot developments and character developments correspond to changes in the setting.

Understanding Setting

Setting is an essential component of literature, and it's one of the first things a writer considers when he or she invents a story. It not only influences a story's characters and events, but also enhances the reader's ability to imagine those characters and events. In other words, setting the scene lets the reader know what type of literary world he or she is entering, so that he or she can get "grounded" and experience it more fully. But well-developed settings don't necessarily need to be richly detailed. Consider Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. To set the scene, Beckett writes only two lines:

> *A country road. A tree.*
>
> *Evening.*

The playwright's spare description of setting isn't underdeveloped—rather, it's quite carefully considered. In this case, Beckett chooses to create a sense of "nowhere" or "no-place" because he feels this will best complement the absurd, existentialist mood of his play. This sense of being "nowhere in particular" is just as effective and important to *Waiting for Godot* as a highly specific description can be to a work of historical fiction.

Fictional and Non-Fictional Settings

Settings can be either imagined or real. It's worth noting that the categories of "imaginary" and "real" don't necessarily correspond to fictional and non-fictional works, respectively—a fictional story can be set in a *real* location, such as Alabama, New York, or Paris. In fact, when an author is very familiar in real life with the setting of his or her story, he or she can use that familiarity to craft a convincing and detailed literary world.

James Joyce is one example of a fiction-writer who worked in an innovative way with non-fictional settings. Joyce grew up in Dublin, and all his most famous works are set in the city. Scholars and fans who attempt to retrace the steps of his characters have found that, with very few exceptions, his descriptions of the city's geography are remarkably accurate to the last detail. In the example section below, we've included an excerpt from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to show how Joyce's descriptions of Dublin's landscape mirror his characters' shifting emotions.

Setting and Exposition

The most important components of setting, such as the overarching time period and location in which a piece of literature takes place, are usually introduced in the exposition of a text (which is often at its beginning). However, it's wise *not* to tune out once you know the general *where* and *when* of a narrative, since setting often shifts. Observing changes in the time of day, the seasons, the weather, the geography and the landscape throughout any given story will enrich your understanding of its characters, their relationships to place, as well as their social and national identities.

Aspects of Setting

The setting of a story can involve a number of elements:

- **The physical location:** The physical realities of where the story takes place, including geography, landscape, and other factors (urban or rural; domestic or wild; inside or out; on earth or in space).
- **Time:** When does the story take place? In the past, the future, the present? What are the particular details of that time.
- **The social milieu:** Setting is not *just* about the physical aspects. It's also about the social world. Is the setting wealthy or poor? Homogenous or diverse? Are things improving or getting worse?
- **Change:** Setting can also be affected by how it changes, either over time (the changing seasons or the construction of a house or town or city), or suddenly (a terrible storm). The changes that do (or don't) affect a setting are as important as the setting itself.

The more specific an author can be with their setting, the more real the story will feel and the more the setting will start to "reach out" and affect the characters and their actions, in the same way the world around living people affects how they act and think.

Setting Examples

In the sections that follow, we give some examples of setting and their impact in various works of literature and film.

Setting in Literature

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Pride and Prejudice takes place in 19th century rural England. The relationship between the novel's protagonist (Elizabeth Bennet) and her wealthy suitor (Mr. Darcy) is central to Austen's investigation of class and character. In the example below, Elizabeth pays her first visit to Darcy's estate—Pemberly—after having rejected his marriage proposal, in part because she perceives him as snobbish and stuck-up:

> Elizabeth, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of Pemberly Woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, her spirits were in a high flutter.
>
> The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground. They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some time through a beautiful wood, stretching over a wide extent.
>
> Elizabeth's mind was too full for conversation, but she saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road, with some abruptness, wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills;—and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!

Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley is a turning point in her relationship to Darcy. When they encounter Darcy on the estate, Elizabeth finds him to be greatly "altered," and not at all uptight as she once thought: he greats her with warmth and is polite to her relatives, even though they are from a lower social class than Darcy. In short, Darcy behaves with the same lack of pretension and "natural" grace that Pemberley possesses. Austen uses her description of Darcy's setting—his *home*—to shed light on his true character.

Setting in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce chronicles the coming-of-age of Stephen Daedalus, an aspiring young writer growing up in Dublin. Stephen is Joyce's literary alter ego—like Joyce, Stephen lives in Dublin and knows the city like the back of his hand. Joyce draws upon his extensive knowledge of Dublin to create an urban setting in his novels that is intensely detailed and often reflective of his characters' emotions. In the example below, Stephen walks from his house in a poor neighborhood to Trinity College. On his way, he thinks about his favorite writers Newman, Cabalcanti, and Ibsen to distract himself from the poverty around him:

> The lane behind the terrace was waterlogged and as he went down it slowly, choosing his steps amid heaps of wet rubbish, he heard a mad nun screeching in the nuns' madhouse beyond the wall.
> —Jesus! O Jesus! Jesus!
> He shook the sound out of his ears by an angry toss of his head and hurried on, stumbling through the mouldering offal, his heart already bitten by an ache of loathing and bitterness...but, as he walked down the avenue and felt the grey morning light falling about him through the dripping trees and smelt the strange wild smell of the wet leaves and bark, his soul was loosed of her miseries...His morning walk across the city had begun, and he foreknew that as he passed the slob lands of Fairview he would think of the cloistral silver veined prose of Newman, that as he walked along the North Strand Road, glancing idly at the windows of the provision shops, he would recall the dark humor of Guido Cavalcanti and smile, that as he went by Baird's stonecutting works in Talbot Place the spirit of Ibsen would blow through him like a keen wind, a spirit of wayward boyish beauty...

Here, Joyce describes the "waterlogged lane" and "mouldering offal" around Stephen's home to show that the Daedalus family lives in poverty, which Stephen longs to escape. By providing detailed descriptions of the grim setting and *pairing* them with glimpses into Stephen's lofty imagination, Joyce is able to show the reader how Stephen creates a parallel, inner world for himself in order to escape his difficult circumstances.

Setting in Ben Lerner's *10:04*

In his novel *10:04*, Lerner tells the story of a writer living in New York city who has agreed to donate his sperm to his best friend, Alex, so that she can have a child. Alex and the narrator aren't romantically involved, and their relationship remains friendly throughout the novel. However, the narrator is going through a turbulent time in his life and feels conflicted about "coconstructing a child" with her. Lerner's narrator hides out in his apartment through two hurricanes, and the extreme weather stirs up his inner turmoil. In the following example, Alex and the narrator have dinner then watch a movie while taking shelter together in her apartment:

> It was only when we sat down to eat by the light—even though we still had power—of some votive candles Alex had discovered that the danger and magnitude of the storm felt real to us, maybe because our meal had the feel of a last supper, maybe because eating together produced a sufficient sense of a household against which we could measure the threat...The food tasted better than it was, since it might be the best we'd have for a while...Was I drinking quickly in part because I felt a little awkward about staying the night at Alex's, something I'd done countless times before? I was just uneasy about the storm, I said to myself... I looked through some discs and put on *Back to the Future*...I turned to Alex and watched the colors from the movie flicker on her sleeping body, noted the gold necklace she always wore against her collarbone. I tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear and then let my hand trail down her face

> and neck and brush across her breast and stomach in one slow motion I halfheartedly attempted to convince myself was incidental...

The setting of this passage (i.e., the storm) isn't just a "backdrop" for the scene; it's the reason that the narrator finds himself alone in a dark apartment with his sleeping friend. In this sense, the setting plays a significant role in what happens. The storm briefly exposes a hidden layer of the relationship between Alex and the narrator, changing his perception of their intimacy and providing an opportunity for the narrator to develop that intimacy further.

Setting in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

In the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare warns the audience that the tragic story they're about to hear is largely a consequence of the play's setting:

> Two households, both alike in dignity,
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
> Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
> Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
> Do with their death bury their parents' strife.
> The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
> And the continuance of their parents' rage,
> Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
> Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
> The which if you with patient ears attend,
> What here shall miss, our toil strive to mend.

Here, Shakespeare not only alerts the reader to the geographic setting of the play (Verona, Italy), but also describes the social element of the story's setting: by beginning with "two households, both alike in dignity" Shakespeare indicates that the two families in question—Capulet and Montague—share the same high social status. In doing so, Shakespeare suggests that *Romeo and Juliet* isn't just a love story, but a political story as well.

Setting in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*

The Glass Menagerie takes place in the Wingfield family's apartment in a St. Louis tenement building. The play's main character, Tom Wingfield, narrates the events of the play from the apartment's fire escape, telling the story of his impoverished family, whom he works hard to support and also longs to escape. In the following passage, Williams establishes the setting of the play:

> The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism.
>
> The apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire escape, the structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation. The fire escape is part of what we see—that is, the landing of it and the steps descending from it.

As Williams explicitly states, the fire escape symbolizes Tom's wish to escape poverty and the responsibility of caring for his family. While the audience may not perceive the symbolic importance of the fire escape, Williams intentionally makes it central to the stage design as a way of highlighting the theme of escape.

Setting in Movies

Setting in *August, Osage County*

August, Osage County is a film adaptation of a play by Tracy Letts. The title immediately divulges the setting of the film, which takes place in the Weston family home outside Pawhuska, Osage County, Oklahoma in August.

Letts' story is a black comedy about a family in shambles. Violet Weston, a drug-addicted cancer patient, hosts her relatives in her Osage County home, where they've all congregated in an effort to support her after her husband, Beverly, commits suicide. The setting—Violet's home—is like a petri dish, causing all of the secret tensions between the assembled family members to surface in just a few weeks. In this sense, the play's title isn't just the backdrop for the story; Letts clearly felt the setting was important enough to the narrative that she used the setting as her title.

Setting in *Synecdoche, New York*

In Synecdoche, New York, director Charlie Kaufman tells the story of theater director Caden Cotard. Cotard lives in Schenectady, a town that actually exists in upstate New York, until his wife and daughter leave him and his health takes a downward turn. He moves to New York City where he embarks on an ambitious dramatic project: building a mock version of NYC in an enormous old warehouse, and instructing actors to live out their lives, simply playing themselves, in the constructed city.

As the fictional New York that Cotard builds in his downtown warehouse becomes increasingly complex, he starts to relive and process his deteriorating personal life within its confines. Cotard constantly makes additions to the miniature city, which grows more elaborate throughout the movie, reflecting his continued inability to come to terms with what's happened to his personal life and family. Therefore, in Kaufman's film, the movie's setting reflects the protagonist's interior life.

What's the Function of Setting in Literature?

As the writer Eudora Welty once said, "Every story would be another story, and unrecognizable as art, if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else… Fiction depends for its life on place. Place is the crossroads of circumstance, the proving ground of, What happened? Who's here? Who's coming?" Accordingly, writers take great care in deciding on and describing the settings of their works, in order to:

- **Reflect or emphasize certain character traits belonging to people who inhabit certain settings.** For example, in the *Pride and Prejudice* quotation above, Austen's descriptions of Mr. Darcy's graciousness and of his estate's natural beauty mirror one another.
- **Give physical form to a theme that runs throughout the narrative.** For example, the fire escape in *The Glass Menagerie* quotation above becomes a physical symbol of Tom Wingfield's desire to escape his surroundings.
- **Indicate the social and economic statuses of their characters, as well as how those characters do or do not conform to those statuses.** In the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* quotation, Joyce's description of Stephen's neighborhood emphasizes his family's poverty. However, Joyce's description of Stephens's thoughts as he passes through the neighborhood shows that Stephen uses his love for literature to insulate himself from poverty.
- **Create a source of pressure or stress that causes characters to act in a certain way.** For instance, in *10.04*, the storm brings out the narrator's suppressed attraction to his friend and gives him an excuse to act on it. Similarly, the tenement house in *The Glass Menagerie* creates an environment of desperation that drives the main characters' behavior.

Drama Interpretation

Drama, as a genre of literature, is unique in the way it presents and develops its story, characters, and themes. Because there is no narrator or narrative in drama, as in a novel or a short story, the audience must rely on the setting of the play and the characters' dialogue, facial expressions, and actions to tell the story. Readers must consider these elements in order to develop their interpretations of the play's themes and characters. Below are some suggestions for analyzing different elements of drama and their relationship with one another. As you proceed through the following steps, take notes, highlight, or underline what you notice in the play.

Plot

Begin by considering what happens in the play. A play has a dramatic arc showing the course of action through an introduction, development of conflict, and resolution of that conflict. What kind of conflict (serious, light, or satirical) is dramatized? How might the conflict and dramatic arc develop a theme or shed light on a particular issue? Are there flashbacks or flash-forwards? Does any important action take place off-stage or before the beginning of the play? How does the play draw our attention to specific issues by focusing on particular events or conversations?

Acts and Scenes

Although twentieth-century drama has come to include plays made up of only one act, typically plays are organized into separate acts and scenes within each act. It may help to construct a brief outline of each act of the play including the setting, what happens, and which characters are introduced. How is the dramatic arc of the play divided among the acts? How does each act provide a particular context for the following act? Does the specific organization of the play's events contribute to the play's themes?

Character

In drama, characters are portrayed through what they say and do rather than through narrative descriptions, so it is helpful to consider what the dialogue tells us about each character. The following exercises can help work out some character analysis.

- For each primary character in the play, make a list of characteristics (e.g., selfish, cowardly, generous, noble), with lines of that character's dialogue that reflect this characteristic. It may help to complete this exercise separately for each scene or act in order to see how the character changes or develops through his or her dialogue. How do the acts of the play, containing different dialogue, reveal various aspects of the character's personality?
- Characters are developed not only through their own words but through other characters' dialogue. Make a list of traits for each character, using other characters' dialogue to consider what can be known about a character by what others say.
- Reflect on how the portrayal of the characters may contribute to the development of themes in the play.

Dialogue

As mentioned, dialogue is a crucial element used to develop the plot and reveal the characters. One can also note word choices and any metaphors, imagery, or puns. Notice instances of verbal irony—moments when the speaker's words convey a meaning that is different or even opposite from the surface meaning. How does the language of the play establish a particular tone or set a mood?

Stage Directions

Stage directions are parenthetical comments that give further descriptions of the setting, characters, and action. These comments, typically placed within brackets, contain information that supplements the dialogue.

Consider this example from Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman.*

> WILLY. Oh, Biff! [Staring wildly.] He cried! Cried to me. [He is choking with his love and now cried out his promise.] That boy—that boy is going to be magnificent! [Ben appears in the light just outside the kitchen.] (1732)

In this scene, the salesman. Willy Loman, speaks about his son, and the stage directions convey the intense emotions Willy has for him. We might not have known the depth of his feelings without these directions. Make sure to examine the stage directions in the play and consider how they contribute to the dialogue or tell something important about the characters.

*Note:
Begin each part of the dialogue with the character's name in all capital letters, indented half an inch from the left margin. Follow the name with a period and then start the quotation. Indent all subsequent lines in that character's speech an additional amount. When the dialogue shifts to another character, start a new line indented half an inch. [from the *MLA Handbook*, 8th Edition, p. 80]

In multiple editions of literary works such as plays, novels, or poems, it is often helpful to provide division numbers in addition to, or instead of, page numbers, for example, (1732; act 2). In this way, readers can find your references in any edition of the work. [from the *MLA Handbook*, 8th edition, p. 57]

In Shakespearean or classical plays, the stage directions are primarily exits, entrances, and locale.

> [*Exeunt* KING and POLONIOUS.]
>
> [*Enter* HAMLET.]
>
> HAMLET. To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles.
> And by opposing end them. (3.1.56-60)

Sources:

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman. The Norton Introduction to Literature*, edited by Kelly J. Mays, shorter 11th ed., W. W. Norton, 2013, pp. 1669-1735.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet. The Norton Introduction to Literature*, edited by Kelly J. Mays, shorter 11th ed., W. W. Norton, 2013, pp. 1309-1458.

The Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook,* 8th ed., The Modern Language Association of America, 2016.

Drama Questions

Use any of these questions you need to help you understand the play.

1. What is the playwright's name? Are the playwright's nationality and dates of birth and death significant for understanding the play?
2. What is the title of the play? When was its first performance?
3. Who is the central character (or characters)? Give a brief description that includes leading traits.
4. How are any other characters described?
5. What is the setting (time and place) of the play's action?
6. What is the dramatic question? This question is whatever the play leads us to ask ourselves: some conflict whose outcome we wonder about, some uncertainty whose resolution we await.
7. How would you briefly summarize the play's principle events in the order in which the playwright presents them? If you are reporting on a long play, you may find it simplest to sum up what happens in each act or, perhaps, in each scene.
8. What is the tone of the play, as best you can detect? Describe the playwright's apparent feelings toward the characters or what happens to them.
9. What language is spoken in the play? Try to describe it. Does any character speak with a choice of words or with figures of speech that strike you as unusual, distinctive, poetic—or maybe dull and drab? Does language indicate a character's background or place of birth? Brief quotations, in what space you have, will be valuable.
10. How would you summarize, in one sentence, the play's central theme? If you find none, say so. Plays often contain more than one theme. Which of them seems most clearly borne out by the main events?
11. Are there any symbols you notice and believe to be important? Try to state in a few words what each suggests.
12. What did you think of the play? Give a concise evaluation of it.

Source:

Kennedy, X. J., and Dana Gioia, editors. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing,* 11th ed., Longman, 2010.

What Is a Short Story?

A short story is a work of short, narrative prose that is usually centered around one single event. It is limited in scope and has an introduction, body and conclusion. Although a short story has much in common with a novel (See How to Analyze a Novel), it is written with much greater precision. You will often be asked to write a literary analysis. An analysis of a short story requires basic knowledge of literary elements. The following guide and questions may help you:

Old Fence. A short story has a structure and a message. Can you analyze this picture in much the same way as a short story?

Setting

Setting is a description of where and when the story takes place. In a short story there are fewer settings compared to a novel. The time is more limited. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How is the setting created? Consider geography, weather, time of day, social conditions, etc.
- What role does setting play in the story? Is it an important part of the plot or theme? Or is it just a backdrop against which the action takes place?

Study the time period, which is also part of the setting, and ask yourself the following:

- When was the story written?
- Does it take place in the present, the past, or the future?
- How does the time period affect the language, atmosphere or social circumstances of the short story?

Characterization

Characterization deals with how the characters in the story are described. In short stories there are usually fewer characters compared to a novel. They usually focus on one central character or protagonist. Ask yourself the following:

- Who is the main character?
- Are the main character and other characters described through dialogue – by the way they speak (dialect or slang for instance)?
- Has the author described the characters by physical appearance, thoughts and feelings, and interaction (the way they act towards others)?
- Are they static/flat characters who do not change?
- Are they dynamic/round characters who DO change?
- What type of characters are they? What qualities stand out? Are they stereotypes?
- Are the characters believable?

Plot and structure

The plot is the main sequence of events that make up the story. In short stories the plot is usually centered around one experience or significant moment. Consider the following questions:

- What is the most important event?
- How is the plot structured? Is it linear, chronological or does it move around?
- Is the plot believable?

Narrator and Point of view

The narrator is the person telling the story. Consider this question: Are the narrator and the main character the same?

By point of view we mean from whose eyes the story is being told. Short stories tend to be told through one character's point of view. The following are important questions to consider:

- Who is the narrator or speaker in the story?
- Does the author speak through the main character?
- Is the story written in the first person "I" point of view?
- Is the story written in a detached third person "he/she" point of view?
- Is there an "all-knowing" third person who can reveal what all the characters are thinking and doing at all times and in all places?

Conflict

Conflict or tension is usually the heart of the short story and is related to the main character. In a short story there is usually one main struggle.

- How would you describe the main conflict?
- Is it an internal conflict within the character?
- Is it an external conflict caused by the surroundings or environment the main character finds himself/herself in?

Climax

The climax is the point of greatest tension or intensity in the short story. It can also be the point where events take a major turn as the story races towards its conclusion. Ask yourself:

- Is there a turning point in the story?
- When does the climax take place?

Theme

The theme is the main idea, lesson, or message in the short story. It may be an abstract idea about the human condition, society, or life. Ask yourself:

- How is the theme expressed?
- Are any elements repeated and therefore suggest a theme?
- Is there more than one theme?

Style

The author's style has to do with the his or her vocabulary, use of imagery, tone, or the feeling of the story. It has to do with the author's attitude toward the subject. In some short stories the tone can be ironic, humorous, cold, or dramatic.

- Is the author's language full of figurative language?
- What images are used?

- Does the author use a lot of symbolism? Metaphors (comparisons that do not use “as” or “like”) or similes (comparisons that use “as” or “like”)?

Your literary analysis of a short story will often be in the form of an essay where you may be asked to give your opinions of the short story at the end. Choose the elements that made the greatest impression on you. Point out which character/characters you liked best or least and always support your arguments.

Guidelines for Writing a Literary Critical Analysis

What is a literary critical analysis?

A literary critical analysis explains a work of fiction, poetry or drama by means of interpretations. The goal of a literary analysis (as with any other analysis) is to broaden and deepen your understanding of a work of literature.

What is an interpretation?

An interpretation is an individual response that addresses meaning.

Example: The mother in Jamaica Kinkaid's story "Girl" cannot speak directly of her love for her daughter, so Kinkaid uses details about a woman's everyday life to convey her pride and anxiety about her daughter.

How do you develop an interpretation?

Interpretations are developed by an in-depth examination of a text. An interpretation often will be the thesis of your paper.

How do you conduct an "in-depth" examination of a text?

1. Before reading the work, make sure to examine the title carefully. Often the title is a clue to an important idea in the work.
2. Make sure you look up in the dictionary any words with which you are not familiar.
3. After reading the work the first time, ask yourself the following questions:
    - What is the geographical, historical and social setting? How does this affect the story or poem?
    - Who is (are) the main character(s)?
    - Who are the secondary characters, and how are they linked to the main characters?
    - Does the main character change? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
    - What is the conflict? Can you trace the development and resolution of the conflict?
    - Who is telling the story? How does this influence the story or poem?
    - In poetry, can you find a pattern of rime and meter?
4. As you re-read the work, make sure you can answer these questions. Then ask yourself the following questions, which may help you to discover deeper meanings that will lead you to an interpretation.
    - Can you summarize the author's meaning in one paragraph?
    - Can you state a theme of the work in one sentence?
    - Can you identify any symbols or metaphors? What do they mean?

How do you prove your interpretation?

You prove your interpretation by finding a pattern of examples in the literature that support your idea. You find this pattern in the literary elements, such as plot, point of view, character, setting, symbols, tone, and style. In poetry, the uses of language (rime, meter and metaphors) are also patterns that can support your interpretation.

If interpretations are an individual response, are all interpretations valid?

Because an interpretation must be supported, the strength or weakness of your interpretation rests on the strength or weakness of your argument. In other words, you must organize a discussion that convinces the reader that your point of view is astute.

Where do you find evidence to support your interpretation?

In a literary analysis evidence is found mainly from the work you are discussing. Secondary sources (published critical analyses) may support your point of view as well.

How much of the story should you retell in a critical analysis?

You do need to locate your reader to the scene or section of the poem that you are discussing; therefore, some plot summary is necessary, but re-telling the story or a poem is not considered an analysis. You can assume your reader has read the work.

What should be documented in a critical analysis?

Any secondary sources must, of course, be documented. Also, direct quotes should be documented. Unlike secondary sources, a summary of a literary scene or event does not need documentation. Typically, MLA style documentation is used.

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Main Idea

Main Idea Definition

Main Idea includes the overall message of the text that a writer intends to convey to the audience. Almost all genres of literature have one or two main ideas in them. However, the main idea in literature is not limited to one sentence or paragraph; instead, it develops and grows throughout the text. It works as the central, unifying element of the story which ties together all other elements. In this sense, it can be best defined as the dominant impression or the generic truth incorporated in the literary piece. Etymologically, the central idea is the phrase of two words 'main' and 'idea.' The meaning is clear that it is the most important thought of a text which enables the readers to understand the layered meanings of the concerned text.

Examples Main Idea from Literature

Example #1

"A Red, Red Rose" by Robert Burns

> "O my Luve is like a red, red rose
> That's newly sprung in June;
> O my Luve is like the melody
> That's sweetly played in tune.
> So fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
> So deep in luve am I;
> And I will luve thee still, my dear,
> Till a' the seas gang dry.
>
> Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
> And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
> I will love thee still, my dear,
> While the sands o' life shall run.
>
> And fare thee weel, my only luve!
> And fare thee weel awhile!
> And I will come again, my luve,
> Though it were ten thousand mile."

This is one of the famous poems of Robert Burns, a renowned Scottish poet, and lyricist. The poem illustrates the intense love of the speaker for his beloved. The central idea of the poem is love, which the writer has declared in the opening lines. However, he further supports this idea by comparing his beloved with a red rose. He has also employed literary elements to make the readers understand his version of love. To him, beauty is transitory, but his love is holy and eternal. Thus, the central idea plays a great role in advancing the action of this poem.

Example #2

Invictus by William Ernest Henley

> Out of the night that covers me,
> Black as the pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul.
>
> In the fell clutch of circumstance
> I have not winced nor cried aloud.
> Under the bludgeonings of chance
> My head is bloody, but unbowed.
>
> Beyond this place of wrath and tears
> Looms but the Horror of the shade,
> And yet the menace of the years
> Finds and shall find me unafraid.
>
> It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate,
> I am the captain of my soul.

The poem, having an artistic expression, was composed to illustrate the courageous stance of a person in unfortunate circumstances. The main idea of the poem is the resilience of human spirit in the face of miseries and challenges of life. Despite having troubles and adverse circumstances, the speaker holds his spirit high and face the difficult time of his life bravely. His optimism and ability to overcome the adversity makes him stronger as he calls himself the master of his fate. He is not afraid of the problems and, this belief enables him to overcome any obstacle that comes to his way. Therefore, courage makes up the main idea of the poem.

Example #3

SCENE I. A desert place. (Macbeth by William Shakespeare, Act I, Scene I)

> *Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches*
> **First Witch**
> When shall we three meet again

> In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
> **Second Witch**
> When the hurlyburly's done,
> When the battle's lost and won.
> **Third Witch**
> That will be ere the set of sun.
> **First Witch**
> Where the place?
> **Second Witch**
> Upon the heath.
> **Third Witch**
> There to meet with Macbeth.
> **First Witch**
> I come, Graymalkin!
> **Second Witch**
> Paddock calls.
> **Third Witch**
> Anon.
> **ALL**
> Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
> Hover through the fog and filthy air.

This extract has been taken from one of the famous plays of Shakespeare, Macbeth. This is the opening scene of Macbeth in which three witches discuss their next meeting point, where they plan to see Macbeth. This opening scene not only sets the tone of the play but also highlights the recurring motif of the supernatural creatures. The audience immediately gets an idea that the text is about the evil and foul play.

Main Idea Meaning and Function

Main idea serves as the pause for the audience. It provides them an opportunity to understand the writer's intention or the reason for his writing. It also makes them recognize and appreciate the deeper meanings of the texts. The writers also use it as a tool that enables them to project their inner thoughts and persuade the readers. Moreover, some of the academic writings unconsciously instill main ideas into the subconscious of the readers with ulterior motives which can be good or bad.

Theme in Literature

As you continue to savor literature throughout your life, you'll encounter five important elements to any narrative: character, setting, plot, conflict, and theme. No story would be worthwhile without a multi-faceted main character, an interesting setting, an engaging plot (or series of events), a conflict to overcome, and a central theme or message.

The theme is a pivotal element, because it lingers throughout the entire story, from start to finish. It can be whatever the author deems appropriate, and there can also be more than one theme. Before we dive into several examples of theme in literature, let's start with a thorough review of this important element.

What Is Theme?

In any work of art, the theme is the underlying message that the writer would like to get across. Maybe it's a theme of bravery, perseverance, or undying love.

Whether you're reading your favorite Disney book or working your way through *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, there will always be a pervasive theme woven through the story. You'll notice the characters embracing - or turning away from - the theme time and again, and you'll see how their relationship to the theme impacts the events that unfold.

It's important not to confuse the theme and the main idea. The theme is an underlying message of bravery, or hope, or love. The main idea, however, is simply what the story is about. In a way, the main idea is a tight summary of the plot.

How to Find the Theme

No story is complete without a few essential elements. They are:

- Characters - The people who take part in the action of the story
- Setting - Where the story takes place
- Plot - The events that make up a story
- Conflict - The struggle faced by the main character that must reach a resolution

At this point, you can also ask yourself, "What's the main idea? What's the short version of the story?" Once you're comfortable speaking on each of these elements, it's time to dive into the theme. These three questions will help you unearth it:

1. What problem is the main character facing?
2. What lesson did the main character learn?
3. What message can you take away from the story?

Once you hit that third question, you'll be well on your way to understanding the theme of the story.

Common Theme Examples

The more you read, the more you'll spot some of the popular literary themes. Common themes include:

- Compassion
- Courage
- Death and dying
- Honesty
- Loyalty
- Perseverance
- Importance of family
- Benefits of hard work
- Power of love
- Friendship
- Revenge
- Redemption

Of course, the list goes on and on. That's the beauty of artistic expression. A book's central theme can be anything the author chooses to focus on. Certainly, courage, death, friendship, revenge, and love are five themes that abound. Let's take a closer look at these common themes, as well as some interesting examples from popular works of fiction.

Courage

Courage is a wonderful theme to explore in writing. Life is full of difficult moments that must be surmounted, so why not draw inspiration from fictional and nonfictional characters in a piece of literature? It just may be the story that inspires someone else to push through the next challenge in life. Here are a few examples of courage in major works of literature:

- *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway features characters who endure a difficult war and display honorable courage in nearly every instance.
- *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien tells the tale of a homely hobbit who sets off on an important quest.
- *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by Homer also maintain a war theme and the bravery that one must assume in order to survive.
- ***Life of Pi*** by Yann Martel tells the story of a young boy fighting to survive after a shipwreck in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.
- ***Lord of the Flies*** by William Golding features a group of boys stranded on a deserted island, fighting to survive. Courage is just one of the book's central themes.

- ***War and Peace*** by Leo Tolstoy highlights the courage of the men fighting a war as well as the courage of the women who must make difficult decisions back on the homefront.

Death and Dying

Death is something everyone will face. It's packed with so much uncertainty. And, for those left behind, it leaves lingering feelings of sadness and, sometimes, even remorse. This can be a great theme if your goal is to tug at the heartstrings of your readers. Here are a few examples of death and dying in major works of literature:

- ***The Book Thief*** by Markus Zusak features a narrator who is Death himself, as he takes lives throughout WWII in Germany.
- ***The Lovely Bones*** by Alice Sebold explores death and grief from the perspective of a girl who was just murdered.
- ***The Fault in Our Stars*** by John Green focuses on teenagers that must come to terms with their terminal illness.

Friendship

Valued friendships can completely alter one's life. It can sustain you through moments when you need to pull out all of your courage. It can bolster us when we're feeling down. And it's also a wonderful prize when celebrating life's special moments. Here are a few examples of the beauty of friendship in major works of literature:

- ***Don Quixote*** by Miguel de Cervantes tells the story of two men who, essentially, embark on an epic road trip. The ties that bond their friendship make all their adventures possible.
- ***Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*** by J.K. Rowling embraces the theme of friendship. In fact, every novel in the series hones in on this concept. Harry, Ron, and Hermione's unbreakable friendship is strong enough to allow them to stand up to even the greatest of sorcerers.
- ***The Outsiders*** by S.E. Hinton promotes the theme of friendship and how having someone to lean on can usher you through some of life's most pivotal moments.

Love

Of course, love can move the world. When two characters fall in love, they'll go to any lengths to stay together. It makes for an interesting story to see how love survives, despite all the curveballs the main characters might face. Here are a few examples of love in major works of literature:

- ***Anna Karenina*** by Leo Tolstoy focuses on love as a theme. What's interesting here is that love is displayed as both a destructive and productive force, both inside and outside the context of marriage.
- ***Pride and Prejudice*** by Jane Austen explores the theme of love during a time when people didn't really date outside their social spheres. The two main characters give light to the theme of love and how, sometimes, it can conquer all.
- ***Romeo and Juliet*** by William Shakespeare also demonstrates how love can be such a driving force that, if love can't be had, nothing short of death will do.

- ***Sense and Sensibility*** by Jane Austen explores the theme of love, demonstrating how, to have it, one must experience a bit of discomfort too.
- ***Wonder*** by R.J. Palacio focuses on love, but not necessarily romantic love. We see the love that the main character's family shows for him, as well as the differences between the friends who love him and the antagonists who give him a hard time.
- ***Wuthering Heights*** by Emily Bronte explores the theme of love but where the two main characters are equally in love and at war with one another.

Revenge

Of course, the theme in a novel doesn't always have to be a positive thing. It can be a negative attribute that might inspire readers to take a better path in life. Here are a few examples of the detriments of revenge in major works of literature:

- ***The Count of Monte Cristo*** by Alexandre Dumas plays with the theme of revenge from nearly every angle and character viewpoint. It also plays on the theme of power because, as soon as the count takes a position of power, he doles out revenge to those who hurt him along the way.
- ***The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*** by Stieg Larsson features a main character who takes revenge on those who falsely accused her in the previous book in the series, *The Girl Who Played with Fire*.
- ***Macbeth*** by William Shakespeare features revenge as a theme because one of the characters, Macduff, makes many efforts to exact revenge on Macbeth after he learns of his family's death.

Difference Between Theme and Morals

If the theme drives home the central message that the writer would like to convey, then how is it any different from the moral of the story? In truth, themes are far more general than the moral of the story.

The moral is a specific lesson that the author is trying to teach. Meanwhile, the theme can be more generalized; there can also be more than one theme in a story. Readers uncover theme(s) as they go along, because it consistently reappears throughout the work of fiction (or nonfiction). As such, a moral can be a theme, but the theme doesn't have to be the moral of the story.

For example, in Romeo and Juliet, one could argue that the theme is the power of love. Love drew these two characters to one another, and nothing was going to stop them from coming together. However, the moral of the story is quite different. The case could be made that the moral of the story is not to let old family wounds carry on needlessly. Or, don't let your ego rule your life, especially when it comes at the expense of your children's happiness.

So, the moral (repair old family wounds) can be one of the themes of the story, but the theme (undying love) isn't necessarily the moral of the story.

Difference Between Theme and Mood

While the theme is the underlying message that the writer would like to convey, the mood is a literary element that evokes certain feelings through words and descriptions. The mood can evoke an emotional response from your readers, helping them connect with your writing piece.

In a way, the mood the author establishes creates an emotional setting. One of the ways mood can be established is through the point of view in which the story is being told. Let's take a look at an example from "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost.

> "I shall be telling this with a sigh
> Somewhere ages and ages hence:
> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference."

That creates rather a gloomy mood, doesn't it? Frost indicates he shall be telling this with a sigh. However, that's an appropriate mood, given the author's reflection on a regrettable choice he made in the past.

Binding a Story Together

Throughout every bit of character development and conflict resolution, a theme should be prevalent. It's the glue that binds the story together. If the theme is courage, we'll see it in most of the pivotal plot elements. We'll admire the main character for his strength and resolute behavior. We'll see it unfold, no matter the setting or number of characters.

The next time you read a new work of fiction or nonfiction, jot down notes pertaining to the theme or themes. See how many you can find. After you've turned that final page, see what central message you've taken away with you. Perhaps it'll inspire you to live a better tomorrow.

Are you ready to frame a theme into a fascinating story that'll stand the test of time? You can get started with these tips on writing a bestseller.

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A CHECKLIST OF FORMALIST CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. How is the work structured or organized? How does it begin? Where does it go next? How does it end? What is the work's plot? How is its plot related to its structure?
2. What is the relationship of each part of the work to the work as a whole? How are the parts related to one another?
3. Who is narrating or telling what happens in the work? How is the narrator, speaker, or character revealed to readers? How do we come to know and understand this figure?
4. Who are the major and minor characters, what do they represent, and how do they relate to one another?
5. What are the time and place of the work—its setting? How is the setting related to what we know of the characters and their actions? To what extent is the setting symbolic?
6. What kind of language does the author use to describe, narrate, explain, or otherwise create the world of the literary work? More specifically, what images, similes, metaphors, symbols appear in the work? What is their function? What meanings do they convey?

BIOGRAPHICAL *PERSPECTIVES*

Overview of Biographical Criticism

To what extent a writer's life should be brought to bear on an interpretation of his or her work has long been a matter of controversy. Some critics insist that biographical information at best distracts from and at worst distorts the process of analyzing, appreciating, and understanding literary works. These critics believe that literary works must stand on their own, stripped of the facts of their writers' lives.

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Against this view, however, can be placed one that values the information readers gain from knowing about writers' lives. Biographical critics argue that there are essentially three kinds of benefits readers acquire from using biographical evidence for literary interpretation: (1) readers understand literary works better since the facts about authors' experiences can help readers decide how to interpret those works; (2) readers can better appreciate a literary work for knowing the writer's struggles or difficulties in creating it; and (3) readers can better assess writers' preoccupations by studying the ways they modify and adjust their actual experience in their literary works.

Knowing, for example, that Shakespeare and Molière were actors who performed in the plays they wrote provides an added dimension to our appreciation of their genius. It also might invite us to look at their plays from the practical standpoint of a performer rather than merely from the perspective of an armchair reader, a classroom student, or a theatergoer. Or to realize that Ernest Hemingway's story "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (pages 337-357) derives from experiences he had in Africa hunting big game and from one of his numerous marriages may lead readers to his biography to see just how the life and work are related, especially to see how Hemingway selected from and shaped his actual experience to create this short story. In addition, readers may be interested in knowing that in original drafts of the "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," the names of the characters and certain of their denning characteristics as presented in the published story were different, and that Hemingway chose his published title after rejecting more than a dozen other possibilities, including "The New Man," "The End of the Marriage," "The Cult of Violence," "The Master Passion," and "The Struggle for Power." Considering such biographical information and using it to

analyze the finished literary work can be illuminating rather than distracting or distorting. Thinking about these different alternative titles can lead readers to focus on different aspects of the story, especially to emphasize different incidents and to value the viewpoints of different characters. As with any critical approach, however, a biographical perspective should be used judiciously, keeping the focus on the literary work and using the biographical information to clarify understanding and to develop an interpretation.

A biographical critic can focus on a writer's works not only to enhance understanding of them individually but also to enrich a reader's understanding of the artist. In an essay on the relations between literature and biography, Leon Edel, author of an outstanding biography of Henry James, suggests that what the literary biographer seeks to discover about the subject are his or her characteristic ways of thinking, perceiving, and feeling that may be revealed more honestly and thoroughly in the writer's work than in his or her conscious non-literary statements. In addition, what we learn about writers from a judicious study of their work can also be linked with an understanding of the writer's world, and thus serve as a bridge to an appreciation of the social and cultural contexts in which the writer lived.

Thinking from a Biographical Perspective

Whether one focuses on formalist questions to analyze "The Use of Force" or on other issues such as the doctor's psychological impulses or the power struggles among doctor, patient, and parents, biographical information can add to a reader's appreciation of the story. In addition to being a writer, William Carlos Williams was a doctor, a pediatrician with a practice in Rutherford, New Jersey. Williams never gave up medicine for literature, as some other writers did. Instead he continued to treat patients all his life. In fact, he acquired some of the

raw material for his poetry, fiction, and essays directly from his practice of medicine.

Another biographical fact of interest is that Williams did some of his writing between seeing patients. He would typically jot notes, write lines of poems, sketch outlines for stories, record dialogue, and otherwise fill the gaps in his time with his writing. Some have suggested that Williams's many short sketches, brief stories, and short poems result directly from this method of composing. Of course, Williams did not do all of his writing in the short bursts of time between seeing his patients. He also wrote during vacations and more extended blocks of time. And, Williams did, in fact, write one of the longest American poems of the century, *Paterson,* a book-length poem in five long sections, written and published over a period of more than twenty years.

Of biographical interest regarding Dickinson's "I'm 'wife' " is the fact that Dickinson never married. A critic with a biographical bent might see in this early poem themes and concerns that became important preoccupations for the poet, issues of gender and power, concerns about the relationship between men and women in marriage, both a marriage she may have wanted for herself and the marriage ot her brother, a marriage that some biographers argue was a disappointment to her, though one she initially encouraged. Biographical questions of interest would focus on whether Dickinson's poem was based on her own experience, perhaps on frustrated hopes, or whether it was simply a metaphor she played with poetically to deflect the circumstances of everyday reality.

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A CHECKLIST OF BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. What influences—persons, ideas, movements, events—evident in the •writer's life does the work reflect?
2. To what extent are the events described in the work a direct transfer of what happened in the writer's actual life?
3. What modifications of the actual events has the writer made in the literary work? For what possible purposes?
4. Why might the writer have altered his or her actual experience in the literary work?
5. What are the effects of the differences between actual events and their literary transformation in the poem, story, play, or essay?
6. What has the author revealed in the work about his or her characteristic modes of thought, perception, or emotion? What place does this work have in the artist's literary development and career?

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

An Overview of Historical Criticism

Historical critics approach literature in two ways: (1) they provide a context of background information necessary for understanding how literary works were perceived in their time; (2) they show how literary works reflect ideas and attitudes of the time in which they were written. These two general approaches to historical criticism represent methods and approaches that might be termed "old historicism" and "new historicism" respectively.

The older form of historical criticism, still in use today, insists that a literary work be read with a sense of the time and place of its creation. This is necessary, insist historical critics, because every literary work is

a product of its time and its world. Understanding the social background and the intellectual currents of that time and that world illuminate literary works for later generations of readers.

Knowing something about the London of William Blake's time, for example, helps readers better appreciate and understand the power of Blake's protest against horrific social conditions and the institutions of church and state Blake held responsible for permitting such conditions to exist. In his poem "London" (page 562), Blake refers to chimney sweepers, who were usually young children small enough to fit inside a chimney, and whose parents sent them to a kind of work that drastically curtailed not only their childhood but also their lives. Or, to take another example, understanding something about the role and position of women in late nineteenth-century America helps readers of the late twentieth century better understand the protagonist of Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (page 38). Readers might appreciate why, for example, Mrs. Mallard feels the need to escape from her marriage and why her feelings are described by turns as exhilarating and "monstrous."

Thinking from a New Historicist Perspective

Like earlier historical approaches, a more contemporary approach identified as "new historicism" considers historical contexts of literary works essential for understanding them. A significant difference, however, between earlier historical criticism and new historicism is the newer variety's emphasis on analyzing historical documents with the same intensity and scrutiny given foregrounded passages in the literary works to be interpreted. In reading Williams's "The Use of Force," for example, a new historicist might pay as much attention to Williams's and other doctors' medical records of the 1920s and 1930s as to the

details of incident and language in the story itself. Similarly, in interpreting Dickinson's "I'm 'wife' " new historicist critics would concern themselves with diaries of women written during the early 1860s, when the poem was written. In both instances the records and diaries would be read to ascertain prevailing cultural attitudes about doctor-patient relationships and middle-class marriage respectively. In addition, new historicist critics might also typically compare prevailing cultural attitudes about these issues today with those of the times in which the story and poem were written. In fact, one common strategy of new historicist critics is to compare and contrast the language of contemporaneous documents and literary works to reveal hidden assumptions, biases, and cultural attitudes that relate the two kinds of texts, literary and documentary, usually to demonstrate how the literary work shares the cultural assumptions of the document.

An important feature of new historicist criticism is its concern with examining the power relations of rulers and subjects. A guiding assumption among many new historicist critics is that texts, not only literary works but also documents, diaries, records, even institutions such as hospitals and prisons, are ideological products culturally constructed from the prevailing power structures that dominate particular societies. Reading a literary work from a new historicist perspective thus becomes an exercise in uncovering the conflicting and perspectives of the marginalized and suppressed, as, for example, the perspective and voice of the young patient in "The Use of Force," and the values of the speaker in Dickinson's "I'm 'wife'," whose perspectives tend to be undervalued because they are females.

While appropriating some of the methods of formalist and deconstructive critics, new historicists differ from them in a number of

important ways. Most importantly unlike critics who limit their analysis of a literary work to its language and structure, new historicists spend more time analyzing nonliterary texts from the same time in which the literary work was written. New historicists, however, do apply the close reading strategies of formalist and deconstructive perspectives, but their goal is not, like the formalists, to show how the literary work manifests universal values or how it is unified. Nor is the new historicist goal to show how the text undermines and contradicts itself, an emphasis of deconstructivist perspectives. Instead, new historicists analyze the cultural context embedded in the literary work and explain its relationship with the network of the assumptions and beliefs that inform social institutions and cultural practices prevalent in the historical period when the literary work was written. Finally, it is important to note that for new historicist critics, history does not provide mere “background" against which to study literary works, but is, rather, an equally important "text," one that is ultimately inseparable from the literary work, which inevitably reveals the conflicting power relations that underlie all human interaction, from the small-scale interactions with families to the large-scale interactions of social institutions.

One potential danger of applying historical perspectives to literature is that historicaI information and documents may be foregrounded and emphasized so heavily that readers lose sight of the literary work the historical approach is designed to illuminate. When the prism of history is used to clarify and explain elements of the literary work, however, whether in examining intellectual currents, describing social conditions, or presenting cultural attitudes, readers’ understanding of literary works can be immeasurably enriched. The challenge for historicaI understanding, whether one uses the tools of the older historicist tradition or the rnethods of the new historicism, is to ascertain what the past was truly like, how its values are inscribed in its cultural artifacts,

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including its literature. Equally challenging is an exploration of the question. What was it possible to think or do at a particular moment of the past, including possibilities that may no longer be available to those living today?

LIST OF HISTORICAL AND NEW HISTORICIST ;AL QUESTIONS

1. When was the work written? When was it published? How was it received by the critics and the public? Why?
2. What does the work's reception reveal about the standards of taste and value during the time it was published and reviewed?
3. What social attitudes and cultural practices related to the action of the work were prevalent during the time the work was written and published?
4. What kinds of power relations does the work describe, reflect, or embody?

5. How do the power relations reflected in the literary work manifest themselves in the cultural practices and social institutions prevalent during the time the work was written and published?
6. What other types of historical documents, cultural artifacts, or social institutions might be analyzed in conjunction with particular literary works? How might a close reading of such a nonliterary "text" illuminate those literary works?
7. To what extent can we understand the past as it is reflected in the literary work? To what extent does the work reflect differences from the ideas and values of its time?

more powerful term?

3. What is the prevailing ideology or set of cultural assumptions in the work? Where are these assumptions most evident?
4. What passages of the work most reveal gaps, inconsistencies, or contradictions?
5. How stable is the text? How decidable is its meaning? ’

CULTURAL STUDIES PERSPECTIVES

An Overview of Cultural Studies

The term "cultural studies" indicates a wide range of critical approaches to the study of literature and society. It is a kind of umbrella term that not only includes approaches to the critical analysis of society such as Marxism, feminism, structuralism, deconstruction, and new historicism, but also refers to a wide range of interdisciplinary studies, including women’s studies, African-American studies, Asian, Native American, Latino studies, and other types of area studies.

Like deconstruction, feminism, and new historicism, cultural studies perspectives are multidisciplinary. These and other forms of cultural criticism typically include the perspectives of both humanistic disciplines, such as literature and art, and the social and behavioral sciences, such as anthropology, economics, and psychology. The idea of cultural studies, however, is broader than any of the particular critical perspectives described in this chapter. Cultural studies are not restricted, for example, to structuralist or deconstructionist critical pro-cedures, nor are they solely concerned with feminist issues or Marxist causes.

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As a critical perspective in the late twentieth century, cultural studies employs a definition of culture that differs from two other common ways of considering it. Traditionally, and especially from the perspective of anthropology, culture has been considered as the way of life of a people, including its customs, beliefs, and attitudes, all of which cohere in a unified and organic way of life. This traditional anthropological notion has coexisted with another idea, one of culture as representing the best that a civilization has produced—in its institutions, its political and philosophical thought, its art, literature, music, architecture and other lasting achievements.

Both of these ways of viewing culture are contested by the newer forms of cultural studies, which look not at the stable coherences of a society or a civilization's history, but at its dissensions and conflicts. For the newer versions of cultural criticism, the unifying concerns and values of older forms of cultural study are suspect, largely because they avoid issues of political and social inequality. In fact, one way of viewing the current debate over the humanities described in an earlier section of this chapter, "The Canon and the Curriculum," is as a conflict between the older view of cultural studies that emphasizes a kind of normative national cultural consensus, and newer versions, which challenge such norms and values and question the very idea of cultural consensus.

Moreover, the different goals and procedures of these contrasting cultural studies perspectives, along with the differences among the critical perspectives described earlier, powerfully illustrate how nearly everything now associated with literate culture has become contested. These areas of contestation include not only the meaning of "culture,"

but the meaning of teaching, learning, reading, and writing, along with notions of text, author, meaning, criticism, discipline, and department. Cultural studies perspectives breach the traditional understanding of these terms, in the process redrawing the boundaries that formerly separated them.

The notion of boundaries, in fact, is one of the more helpful metaphors for thinking about the new cultural studies. That some new emergent critical schools overlap or that critical perspectives may combine forces suggests how disciplinary borders are being crossed and their boundaries reconfigured. In addition to crossing geographical and intellectual boundaries (as well as those between high and popular culture), the new cultural studies also envision a plurality of cultures rather than seeing "Culture" with a capital "C" as singular, monolithic, or universal.

Thinking from a Cultural Studies Perspective

In considering literary works and other kinds of canonical and noncanonical texts from the various standpoints of cultural studies, it is important to note that no single approach, method, or procedure prevails. There is, then, no single "cultural studies" perspective on Williams's "The Use of Force" or Dickinson's "I'm 'wife'." Rather there are various ways of thinking about the cultural and social issues embedded in these works. Some of these issues have been raised in the explanations of feminist, Marxist, new historicist, structuralist, and deconstructionist critical perspectives.

One additional cultural studies perspective that has recently gained prominence is that *of gender criticism,* more specifically gay and lesbian studies. Gender criticism and studies overlap, to some extent,

with feminist critical perspectives. In addition to studying the relations between and among men, gender criticism also explores such intra-gender issues of women as lesbian sexuality and female power relations.

One of the central problems of gender studies is the way gender is defined. To what extent, for example, does gender overlap with sex? To what extent is gender a cultural category and sex a biological one? To what extent do the language of sexuality used in the past and the current uses of both "sex" and "gender" as categories reflect biological, psychological, and socially constructed elements of sexual difference? Related to these overlapping questions are others, especially considerations of what some gender critics see as heterosocial or heterosexist bias in the very concept of gender and gender relations.

Gender critics share with adherents of other socially oriented perspectives a concern for analyzing power relations and for discerning ways in which homophobic discourse and attitudes prevail in society at large. Through analysis of various forms of historical evidence and through acts of political agency, gender critics have challenged perspectives that view homosexual acts and unions as "sinful" or "diseased." They have questioned the way AIDS has been represented in the mainstream media and have opened up discussion about what constitutes such apparently familiar notions as "family," "love," and "sexual identity."

A CHECKLIST OF GENDER STUDIES CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of sexual identity, behavior, and attitudes are reflected in the work? Is there any overtly or covertly expressed view of homosexuality or lesbianism?

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2. To what extent does the work accommodate, describe, or exemplify same-sex relationships? To what extent are same-sex sexual relationships either in the foreground or background of the work?
3. With what kinds of social, economic, and cultural privileges (or lack thereof) are same-sex unions or relationships depicted? With what effects and consequences?

USING CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AS HEURISTICS

One of your more difficult decisions regarding critical theory will be in choosing a critical perspective that is suitable and effective in analyzing a particular literary work. You might be able to offer, for example, a Marxist, deconstructionist, or feminist reading of ’Humpty Dumpty" or "Little Bo Peep," even though these nursery rhymes may not be conventionally approached from any of those critical perspectives. You will need to decide whether one of those approaches offers a richer yield than a more traditional approach, such as formalism or myth criticism. The same is true of your approach to Williams’s "The Use of Force" and Dickinson’s "I’m ’wife’." Although both works have been analyzed in this chapter from ten critical perspectives, you probably found that certain critical perspectives made a better interpretive fit than others for Williams’s story or Dickinson’s poem.

Another thing to remember is that you can combine critical perspectives. There is no rule of interpretation that says you must limit yourself to the language and method of a single critical approach or method. You may wish, for example, to combine formalist and structural perspectives in analyzing "I’m ’wife’," while also raising feminist critical questions in your interpretation. **Or** in interpreting "The

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SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

An Overview of Sociological Criticism

Like historical and biographical critics, sociological critics argue that literary works should not be isolated from the social contexts in which they are embedded. And also like historical critics, especially those who espouse new historicist perspectives, sociological critics emphasize the ways power relations are played out by varying social forces and institutions. Sociological critics focus on the values of a society and how those values are reflected in literary works. At one end of the sociological critical spectrum, literary works are treated simply as documents that either embody social conditions or are a product of those conditions. Critics employing a sociological perspective study the economic, political, and cultural issues expressed in literary works as those issues are reflected in the societies in which the works were produced.

A sociological approach to the study of Shakespeare's *Othello* could focus on the political organization of the Venetian state as depicted in the play and its relation to the play's depiction of authority, perhaps considering as well the breakdown of authority in the scenes set in Cyprus. Another sociological perspective might focus on the play's economic aspects, particularly how money and influence are used to manipulate others. Still other sociological issues that could be addressed include the role of women in the play and the issue of Othello's race. How, for example, does Shakespeare portray the power relations between Othello and Desdemona, Iago and Emilia, Cassio and Bianca? To what extent is each of these women's relationship with men considered from an economic standpoint? Or, to what extent is Othello's blackness a factor in his demise, or is his race a defining

characteristic in other characters' perceptions of him?

Two significant trends in sociological criticism have had a decisive impact on critical theory: Marxist criticism and feminist criticism. Proponents of each of these critical perspectives have used some of the tools of other critical approaches such as the close reading of the formalists and deconstructionists and the symbolic analysis of the psychoanalytic critics to espouse their respective ideologies in interpreting literature.

Marxist Critical Perspectives

In the same way that many psychoanalytic critics base their approach to literature on the theoretical works of Sigmund Freud, Marxist critics are indebted to the political theory of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxist critics examine literature for its reflection of how dominant elite and middle-class/bourgeois values lead to the control and suppression of the working classes. Marxist critics see literature's value in promoting social and economic revolution, with works that espouse Marxist ideology serving to prompt the kinds of economic and political changes that conform to Marxist principles. Such changes would include the overthrow of the dominant capitalist ideology and the loss of power by those with money and privilege. Marxist criticism is concerned both with understanding the role of politics, money, and power in literary works, and with redefining and reforming the way society distributes its resources among the classes. Fundamentally, the Marxist ideology looks toward a vision of a world not so much where class conflict has been minimized but one in which classes have disappeared altogether.

Marxist critics generally approach literary works as products of their

era, especially as influenced, even determined by the economic and political ideologies that prevail at the time of their composition. The literary work is considered a "product" in relation to the actual economic and social conditions that exist at either the time of the work's composition or the time and place of the action it describes.

Marxist analyses of novels focus on the relations among classes. In British and European novels of the nineteenth century, for example, class is a significant factor in the rise and fall of the characters' fortunes. Novels such as Charles Dickens's *Little Dorritt, Domhey and Son,* and *Oliver Twist,* George Eliot's *Middlemarch,* Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds,* and William Makepiece Thackery's *Vanity Fair* portray a panoramic vision of society with characters pressing to move up in social rank and status. These and numerous other novels from the eighteenth through the twentieth century provide abundant territory for Marxist perspectives to investigate the ways political and economic forces conspire to keep some social, ethnic, and racial groups in power and others out. In fact, the Marxist critical perspective has been brought to bear most often on the novel, next most often on drama, and least often on poetry, where issues of power, money, and political influence are not nearly as pervasive.

Thinking from a Marxist Perspective

In applying a Marxist critical perspective to a work like Williams's "The Use of Force," one would consider the ways in which power relations are played out in the story. It seems clear that the doctor is the privileged individual who wields the power over both the girl and her family. Since he can refuse to treat the girl, insist on being paid more for his services, or berate the parents for their ineptitude (though he actually does none of these things), the parents are cowed by his presence. The girl, though defiant, is at his mercy since he is physically

stronger and psychologically more powerful than she is. In addition to such observations, a Marxist critic might consider the story's action from an economic standpoint, in which the doctor performs a service for a fee, with the entire situation viewed strictly as an economic transaction. Moreover, the parents are apparently poor, and one could surmise that they and their daughter might not receive the quality of medical service or the courteous delivery of medical care they would get were they more economically prosperous.

A CHECKLIST OF MARXIST CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. "What social forces and institutions are represented in the work? How are these forces portrayed? What is the author's attitude toward them?
2. What political economic elements appear in the work? How important are they in determining or influencing the lives of the characters?
3. What economic issues appear in the course of the work? How important are economic facts in influencing the motivation and behavior of the characters?
4. To what extent are the lives of the characters influenced or determined by social, political, and economic forces? To what extent are the characters aware of these forces?

Feminist Critical Perspectives

Feminist criticism, like Marxist and new historicist criticism, examines the social and cultural aspects of literary works, especially for what those works reveal about the role, position, and influence of women. Like other socially minded critics, feminist critics consider literature in

relation to its social, economic, and political contexts, and indeed look to analyze its social, economic, and political content. Feminist critics also typically see literature as an arena to contest for power and control, since as sociological critics, feminist critics also see literature as an agent tor social transformation.

Moreover, feminist critics seek to redress the imbalance of literary study in which all important books are written by men or the only characters of real interest are male protagonists. Feminist critics have thus begun to study women writers whose works have been previously neglected. They have begun to look at the way feminine consciousness has been portrayed in literature written by both women and men. And they have begun to change the nature of the questions asked about literature that reflect predominantly male experience. In these and other ways feminist critical perspectives have begun to undermine the patriarchal or masculinist assumptions that have dominated critical approaches to literature until relatively recently. For although feminist critics can trace their origins back to nineteenth-century politics and cite as formative influences the works of Margaret Fuller, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, John Stuart Mill, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, feminist perspectives only began to be raised in literary circles with Virginia Woolfs *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which describes the difficult conditions under which women writers of the past had to work, and with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), which analyzes the biology, psychology, and sociology of women and their place, role, and influence in western culture. It is only in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, that feminist criticism *per se* began to emerge with the publication of Mary Ell-man's *Thinking About Women* (1968), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), and a host of other works that have followed for more than a quarter century and show no signs of abating.

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In his influential and widely used *Glossary of Literary Terms,* M. H. Abrarns identifies four central tenets of much feminist criticism, summarized in the following list.

1. Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal (ruled by the father)—that is, it is male-centered and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a -way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic.
2. The prevailing concepts *of gender*—of the traits that constitute what is masculine and what is feminine—are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs that were generated by the omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization.
3. This patriarchal (or "masculinist," or "androcentric") ideology pervades those writings which have been considered great literature, and which until recently have been written almost entirely by men for men.
4. The traditional aesthetic categories and criteria for analyzing and appraising literary works . . . are in fact infused with masculine assumptions, interests, and ways of reasoning, so that the standard rankings, and also the critical treatments, of literary works have in fact been tacitly but thoroughly gender-biased.[1]

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1 M. H. Abrams. A Glossary of Literary Terms, 6th ed., 1993. pp. 234-235.

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It should be noted, however, that Abrams's list, though helpful, tends to blur distinctions among the many different varieties of feminist criticism as currently practiced. Thus the ways these assumptions are reflected in feminist criticism vary enormously from the reader-response approaches used by feminist critics, such as Judith Fetterley and Elizabeth Flynn, to the cultural studies approaches used by Jane Tompkins and Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, to the Lacanian psycho-analytic approaches employed by Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva. It would be better to think of feminist criticism in the plural as the criticism of feminists rather than to envision it as a singular monolithic entity.

Thinking from a Feminist Perspective

In applying the perspective of feminist criticism to "I'm 'wife'," we might consider the way the roles of woman and wife are suggested in the poem. A feminist reading would be alert for other signs of power contestation in the poem, why for example the speaker compares herself to a "Czar," and what that means in terms other ability to exert her will and control her destiny. Feminist readers would also ask what the masculine term "Czar" signifies in the poem, and whether there is a feminine counterpart.

Feminist readers might also interrogate the poem to ask why the state of wifehood brings "comfort" and "That other" state—of girlhood—"was pain." They would probe beyond the text of the poem to consider the extent to which such differences in experience and feeling obtained in marriages during Dickinson's lifetime, thus sharing an interest with new historicist critics. Moreover, they might also wonder whether the poem's abrupt ending "I'm 'Wife'! Stop there!" with its insistent tone might not mask an undercurrent of fear or powerlessness.

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A CHECKLIST OF FEMINIST CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does the representation of women (and men) in the work reflect the place and time in which the work was written?
2. How are the relations between men and women, or those between members of the same sex, presented in the work? What roles do men and women assume and perform and with what consequences?
3. Does the author present the work from within a predominantly male **or** female sensibility? Why might this have been done, and with what effects?
4. How do the facts of the author's life relate to the presentation of men and women in the work? To their relative degrees of power?
5. How do other works by the author correspond to this one in their depiction of the power relationships between men and women?

READER-RESPONSE PERSPECTIVES

An Overview of Reader-Response Criticism

Reader-response criticism raises the question of where literary meaning resides—in the literary text, in the reader, or in the interactive space between text and reader. Reader-response critics differ in the varying degrees of subjectivity they allow into their theories of interpretation. Some, like David Bleich, see the literary text as a kind of mirror in which readers see themselves. In making sense of literature, readers recreate themselves. Other reader-response critics, like Wolfgang Iser, focus on the text rather than on the feelings and re-actions ot the reader. Text-centered reader-response critics emphasize the temporal aspect of reading, suggesting that readers make sense of

Animal Farm by George Orwell

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_Farm)

Plot summary

Old Major, the old boar on the Manor Farm, summons the animals on the farm together for a meeting, during which he refers to humans as parasites and teaches the animals a revolutionary song called *Beasts of England*. When Major dies, two young pigs, Snowball and Napoleon, assume command and consider it a duty to prepare for the Rebellion. The animals revolt and drive the drunken and irresponsible farmer Mr Jones from the farm, renaming it "Animal Farm". They adopt Seven Commandments of Animalism, the most important of which is, "All animals are equal."

Snowball teaches the animals to read and write, while Napoleon educates young puppies on the principles of Animalism. Food is plentiful, and the farm runs smoothly. The pigs elevate themselves to positions of leadership and set aside special food items, ostensibly for their personal health. Napoleon and Snowball struggle for preeminence. When Snowball announces his plans to build a windmill, Napoleon has his dogs chase Snowball away and subsequently declares himself leader of Animal Farm.

Napoleon enacts changes to the governance structure of the farm, replacing meetings with a committee of pigs who will run the farm. Through a young pig named Squealer, Napoleon claims credit for the windmill idea. The animals work harder with the promise of easier lives with the windmill. When the animals find the windmill collapsed after a violent storm, Napoleon and Squealer convince the animals that Snowball is trying to sabotage their project. Once Snowball becomes a scapegoat, Napoleon begins to purge the farm with his dogs, killing animals he accuses of consorting with his old rival. *Beasts of England* is replaced by an anthem glorifying Napoleon, who appears to be adopting the lifestyle of a man. The animals remain convinced that they are better off than they were under Mr Jones.

Mr Frederick, one of the neighboring farmers, attacks the farm, using blasting powder to blow up the restored windmill. Though the animals win the battle, they do so at great cost, as many, including Boxer the workhorse, are wounded. Despite his injuries, Boxer continues working harder and harder, until he collapses while working on the windmill. Napoleon sends for a van to take Boxer to the veterinary surgeon, explaining that better care can be given there. Benjamin, the cynical donkey who "could read as well as any pig",[8] notices that the van belongs to a knacker, and attempts a futile rescue. Squealer reports that the van was purchased by the hospital and the writing from the previous owner had not been repainted. But in reality, Napoleon has sold his most loyal and long-suffering worker for money to buy himself whisky.

Years pass, and the pigs start to resemble humans, as they walk upright, carry whips, and wear clothes. The Seven Commandments are abridged to a single phrase: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others". Napoleon holds a dinner party for the pigs and local farmers, with whom he celebrates a new alliance. He abolishes the practice of the revolutionary traditions and restores the name "The Manor Farm". As the animals look from pigs to humans, they realize they can no longer distinguish between the two.

Characters

Pigs

- Old Major – An aged prize Middle White boar provides the inspiration that fuels the Rebellion in the book. He is an allegorical combination of Karl Marx, one of the creators of communism, and Lenin, the communist leader of the Russian Revolution and the early Soviet nation, in that he draws up the principles of the revolution. His skull being put on revered public display recalls Lenin, whose embalmed body was put on display.[9][10]
- Napoleon – "A large, rather fierce-looking Berkshire boar, the only Berkshire on the farm, not much of a talker, but with a reputation for getting his own way".[11] An allegory of Joseph Stalin,[9] Napoleon is the main villain of *Animal Farm*. In the first French version of *Animal Farm*, Napoleon is called *César*, the French form of Caesar,[4] although another translation has him as *Napoléon*.[12]
- Snowball – Napoleon's rival and original head of the farm after Jones' overthrow. He is mainly based on Leon Trotsky,[9] but also combines elements from Lenin.[10]
- Squealer – A small, white, fat porker who serves as Napoleon's right-trotter pig and minister of propaganda, holding a position similar to that of Molotov.[9]

- **Minimus** – A poetic pig who writes the second and third national anthems of *Animal Farm* after the singing of "Beasts of England" is banned.
- **The Piglets** – Hinted to be the children of Napoleon and are the first generation of animals subjugated to his idea of animal inequality.
- **The young pigs** – Four pigs who complain about Napoleon's takeover of the farm but are quickly silenced and later executed.
- **Pinkeye** – A minor pig who is mentioned only once; he is the pig that tastes Napoleon's food to make sure it is not poisoned, in response to rumours about an assassination attempt on Napoleon.

Humans

- Mr Jones – The former owner of the farm, Jones is a very heavy drinker. The animals revolt against him after he drinks so much that he does not feed or take care of them. He is an allegory of Russian Tsar Nicholas II,[13] who abdicated following the February Revolution of 1917 and was executed, along with the rest of his family, by the Bolsheviks on 17 July 1918.
- **Mr Frederick** – The tough owner of Pinchfield, a small but well-kept neighbouring farm, who briefly enters into an alliance with Napoleon. He is an allegory of Adolf Hitler,[14][15][16][17] who enters into an alliance with Joseph Stalin only to later break it by invading the Soviet Union.
- Mr Pilkington – The easy-going but crafty and well-to-do owner of Foxwood, a large neighbouring farm overgrown with weeds.
- **Mr Whymper** – A man hired by Napoleon to act as the liaison between Animal Farm and human society. At first he is used to acquire goods needed for the farm, such as dog biscuits and paraffin, but later he procures luxuries like alcohol for the pigs.

Horses

- Boxer – Boxer is a loyal, kind, dedicated, and respectable cart-horse, although quite naive and gullible.
- **Clover** – Boxer's companion, constantly caring for him; she also acts as a matriarch of sorts for the other horses and the other animals in general.
- **Mollie** – Mollie is a self-centred, self-indulgent and vain young white mare who quickly leaves for another farm after the revolution.
- Benjamin – A donkey, one of the oldest animals. He has the worst temper, but is one of the wisest animals on the farm, and is one of the few who can read properly. He is sceptical and pessimistic: his most frequent remark is, "Life will go on as it has always gone on—that is, badly."[18] The academic Morris Dickstein has suggested there is "a touch of Orwell himself in this creature's timeless scepticism"[19] and indeed, friends called Orwell "Donkey George", "after his grumbling donkey Benjamin, in *Animal Farm*."[20]

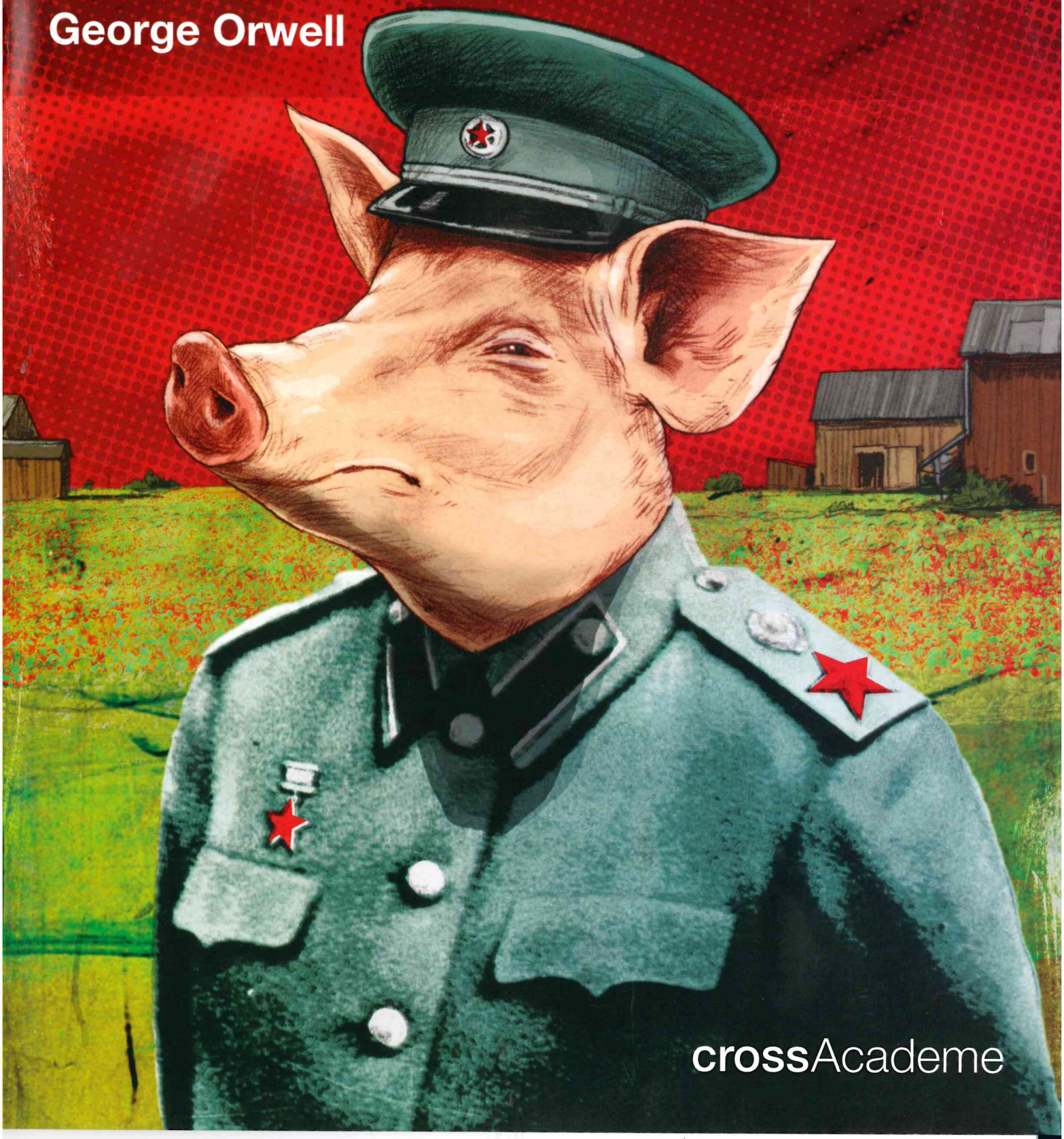
Other animals

- **Muriel** – A wise old goat who is friends with all of the animals on the farm. She, like Benjamin and Snowball, is one of the few animals on the farm who can read.
- **The Puppies** – Offspring of Jessie and Bluebell, taken away from them by Napoleon at birth and reared by Napoleon to be his security force.
- **Moses** – An old raven who occasionally visits the farm, regaling its denizens with tales of a wondrous place beyond the clouds called Sugarcandy Mountain, where he avers that all animals go when they die—but only if they work hard. Orwell portrays religion as "the black raven of priestcraft—promising pie in the sky when you die, and faithfully serving whoever happens to be in power." The raven "was Mr. Jones's especial pet, was a spy and a tale-bearer, but he was also a clever talker." Napoleon brings the raven back, (Ch. IX) as Stalin brought back the Russian Orthodox Church.[19]
- **The Sheep** – They show limited understanding of the situations but nonetheless blindly support Napoleon's ideals with vocal jingles during his speeches and meetings with Snowball.
- **The Hens** – The hens are among the first to rebel against Napoleon.
- **The Cows** – Their milk is stolen by the pigs, who learn to milk them. The milk is stirred into the pigs' mash every day, while the other animals are denied such luxuries.
- **The Cat** – Never seen to carry out any work, the cat is absent for long periods, and is forgiven because her excuses are so convincing and she "purred so affectionately that it was impossible not to believe in her good intentions".[21] She has no interest in the politics of the farm, and the only time she is recorded as having participated in an election, she is found to have actually "voted on both sides".[21]

LITERARY EYE GCSE English

Animal Farm

George Orwell



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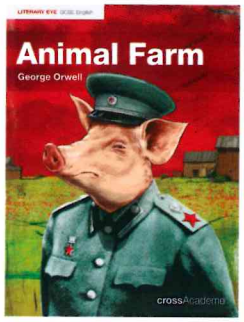

Steve Eddy

Animal Farm

George Orwell

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Page references throughout are to the Penguin Modern Classics edition of *Animal Farm* (1989).

Photographs

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Context

Animal Farm and the Russian Revolution

Orwell gave *Animal Farm* the subtitle 'A Fairy Story', but this was deliberately ironic. In reality the novel represents a major political event – the Russian Revolution of 1917 – and how, in Orwell's view, it was betrayed by Joseph Stalin (1878–1953). Stalin is represented by the pig Napoleon.

Before 1917, Russia was ruled by the Tsar, a monarch with absolute power, supported by landowning nobles. Not long before, landowners had actually owned the peasants ('serfs') who worked their farms for them – just as Jones in *Animal Farm* owns the animals. Serfdom was abolished in 1861, but the peasants were little better off. The Church, represented in the novel by the tame raven Moses, also supported the Tsar.

Demands for political change in Russia had mostly met with further repression. However, middle-class intellectuals, like Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) and Leon Trotsky (1879–1940), and other Bolsheviks, aimed to topple the Tsar. Their main inspiration was the German philosopher Karl Marx (1818–83), who argued that workers would inevitably overthrow their elitist governments and create socialist republics, and that communism would spread worldwide. This is paralleled in *Animal Farm* by efforts to spread the Rebellion to other farms.

The First World War (1914–18) provided the catalyst for the Russian Revolution. This is similar to the way that, in *Animal Farm*, the Rebellion comes about almost by accident, because the animals are hungry. The Russian Revolution took place in two stages. The February Revolution overthrew Tsar Nicolas II and established a provisional government. The October Bolshevik Revolution, headed by Lenin and Trotsky, was more extreme, giving power to the workers. In Orwell's novel there is just one 'Rebellion'.

Civil war and the rise of Stalin

In *Animal Farm* Jones makes two attempts to retake Manor Farm. These correspond to the Russian Civil War of 1918–22. Again, Orwell simplifies history, focusing on the foreign support of 'White' Russians who opposed the 'Red' revolution. Nations like Britain and Germany feared a spread of communism to their own countries, just as in *Animal Farm* local farmers fear animal rebellions and therefore support Jones – though they see that they can profit from his misfortune.

In *Animal Farm* the Rebellion takes place after the death of Old Major, who combines the figures of Marx and Lenin. When Lenin died in 1924, Stalin began to consolidate his own position, eliminating rivals or forcing them into exile. The brilliant but idealistic Trotsky was exiled, then assassinated in Mexico. In *Animal Farm*, Snowball, who represents Trotsky, is forced to flee, pursued by Napoleon's dogs, who represent Stalin's secret police, the KGB.

Stalin also had thousands of opponents murdered. If they were important enough, they were given 'show trials' in which they had little choice but to confess to invented political crimes – a process echoed in Napoleon's brutal executions in Chapter 7.

Another feature of Stalin's dictatorship was propaganda, represented in *Animal Farm* by Squealer. Stalin tried to convince his own people, and foreign governments, that Russia was prosperous. This can be compared with Squealer's use of 'statistics' to convince the animals that they are better off, and by the way in which local farmers are tricked into thinking that the farm is prospering.

Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin

In 1932–34, millions of Russians starved to death – partly owing to Stalin's collectivisation of farming, which forced farmers to hand over their produce to the state. Yet Russia continued to export wheat, especially from the Ukraine. Orwell represents this in *Animal Farm*, for example, by the hens being forced to give up their eggs to be sold.

How Orwell came to write the novel

George Orwell (real name Eric Blair) was born in India in 1903, the son of a colonial civil servant. He was brought back to England aged one, and eventually won a scholarship to Eton. Rather than going to university, he joined the Imperial Police in 1922, working in Burma until he resigned in 1927. He felt that he was unsuitable for the work, and became a critic of imperialism. He moved to Paris in 1928, tried to earn a living as a writer, but lived in poverty for two years.

In 1936, like many intellectuals, Orwell and his wife went to fight against Fascism in the Spanish Civil War. He was shot in the throat but survived and was lucky to escape arrest by the Communists, since he had joined a Trotskyist group. His experience of the feuds between different anti-Fascist factions, of Soviet-backed communist oppression of rival groups, and of their lying propaganda, all found their way into *Animal Farm*.

Orwell was medically unfit to fight in the Second World War, but worked countering Nazi propaganda. In 1943 he resigned and began writing *Animal Farm*. By this time, Stalin was regarded as a hero in Britain. Russia, now Britain's ally, had repelled a Nazi invasion. Orwell, nonetheless, felt that people in Britain should know about his betrayal of the 1917 Revolution. Hence Orwell found it hard to get *Animal Farm* published.

Satire, fable, allegory and fairy tale

Animal Farm is a satire – a work that uses humour and ridicule to criticise those in power. In ancient Greece, Aristophanes' plays satirised the ruler Cleon. More recently, the Irish writer Jonathan Swift satirised British politics in *Gulliver's Travels*. Satirists use irony – pretending to hold views that are the opposite of what they really believe.

Orwell's novel is also a 'fable' – a moral tale using simple animal characters to portray human weaknesses, such as those written by the ancient Greek Aesop (c. 620–564 BCE). This is linked to allegory, in which the elements of a story symbolise aspects of real life.

Finally, *Animal Farm* could be decribed as a 'fairy story' – as Orwell himself called it. It has the tone of a fairy tale, never being openly critical, and innocently pretending ignorance – for example, of the pigs' drunkenness. However, its message remains relevant to modern political 'spin', and more widely to the human capacity for deception.

Activity

LOOKING AT CONTEXT

(a) List ways in which *Animal Farm* corresponds to historical events and figures.

(b) Explain what makes *Animal Farm* a satire and an allegory.

Key point

T. S. Eliot rejected *Animal Farm* on behalf of the publisher Faber, writing that it was not 'the right point of view from which to criticise the political situation at the present time'.

Key point

In *A Modest Proposal*, Swift suggested solving the problem of Irish famines by selling Irish babies for food – bitterly satirising the English government's neglect of Ireland.

Key point

John Bunyan's allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), tells the story of Christian salvation.

Chapter notes

CHAPTER 1

Old Major calls a meeting

Introducing some characters

Manor Farm's owner, Jones, is established as a lazy, careless drunk who deserves to have his animals rebel. This prepares us for news that Old Major has had a dream that he wants to share with the animals. Orwell uses the gathering to introduce some of the animals and reveal their characters.

Orwell tells us that Benjamin is 'devoted to Boxer' (p. 2). However, more often he reveals the animals' characters by their behaviour. The motherly Clover protects the ducklings, Mollie 'the foolish, pretty white mare' (p. 3) tries to make other animals notice her ribbons, and the cat simply finds the warmest place and then ignores Old Major's speech.

Old Major's speech

Old Major describes animal life as 'miserable, laborious and short' (p. 3). His speech uses several rhetorical techniques, such as:

- tricolons (lists of three), for example the one explaining why animals should be able to live comfortably in England – 'The soil of England ...';
- repetition, as in 'He does not give milk, he does not...';
- rhetorical questions, as in 'But is this simply part of the order of Nature?';
- question and answer ('Why then do we continue... Because');
- direct address, as in 'You cows...'.

Old Major urges the animals to 'work night and day, body and soul, for the overthrow of the human race!' (p. 5). He also reassures them that 'sooner or later justice will be done' (p. 6), echoing Marx's belief that the overthrow of the ruling class was inevitable.

Old Major addresses the animals as 'comrades', emphasising their friendship and equality, and tells them they must remain resolved and unified, and never listen to human arguments. He concludes this part of his address with a stirring assertion: 'All men are enemies. All animals are comrades' (p. 6).

When the dogs suddenly chase some rats, this gives rise to a faintly comic policy question: 'Are rats comrades?' (p. 6). It is also comic when the animals vote that rats *are* comrades, and when we hear that the dogs and the cat have voted against this – though the cat votes on both sides. Typically, Orwell does not explain her behaviour. How might you explain it?

'Beasts of England'

Old Major now encourages the animals in a more emotional way. He sings a song that promises a wonderful life without humans. The animals find 'Beasts of England' so inspiring that they sing it five times before Jones wakes and fires his gun. The animals' fearful response reminds us that they are still under his rule. Orwell's use of a simple tricolon ends the chapter with a sense of calm completion – like the end of a bedtime story.

Activity 1

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Which animals have so far behaved either well or badly, and in what ways?

Activity 2

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

Find at least one further example of each of the rhetorical devices mentioned above in Old Major's speech. Suggest what effect each one has.

Key point

The pigs sit at the front, as if deserving the best place.

Key quote

"You young porkers... every one of you will scream your lives out at the block within a year." *Old Major uses emotive language (p. 5)*

Key point

The rat incident breaks up Old Major's speech, holds our interest, shows that socialism may not be easy, and provides an opportunity for democratic action.

CHAPTER 2

The Rebellion

Key quote

"...they all raced out into the pasture together." *Orwell emphasises the animals' unity (p. 15)*

Key point

The animals agree that the farmhouse should become a museum – as did the Tsar's Winter Palace in 1917.

Key quote

"All were agreed that no animal must ever live there." *(p. 16)*

Key point

The Seven Commandments echo the Old Testament Ten Commandments.

Snowball writes the Seven Commandments on the end of the big barn.

The pigs prepare

This chapter establishes the pigs' intelligence, and contrasts Napoleon and Snowball. Napoleon is forceful but 'not much of a talker' (p. 10); Snowball is lively, inventive and articulate, but is considered to have less 'depth of character' than Napoleon. The eloquent Squealer later becomes Napoleon's propagandist.

These three pigs develop Old Major's teachings into 'Animalism' – communism. They encounter several problems in teaching the other animals (pp. 11–12):

- 'stupidity and apathy';
- loyalty to Jones, and the belief that they depend on him;
- indifference to 'what happens after we are dead';
- questioning of why they need to work for the Rebellion if it is inevitable;
- Mollie's frivolity;
- Moses preaching about Sugarcandy Mountain.

The Rebellion

Like the Russian Revolution, the Rebellion happens spontaneously – when the animals are not fed and a cow breaks into the store-shed. It is the men's brutal response that finally provokes the Rebellion. The men are so surprised that they are driven off the farm, Mrs Jones slipping away to join them. In allegorical terms, how do you interpret Moses accompanying her?

Freedom

The animals rush around excitedly, then destroy the trappings of tyranny. Orwell's lists add emphasis: 'the bits, the nose-rings, the dog-chains...' (p. 14). Snowball insists on burning the horses' ribbons, and Boxer even burns the hat that he wears to keep flies off. How might these acts relate to the Russian Revolution? The animals excitedly sing 'Beasts of England' seven times.

The farmhouse

The animals return to the farmhouse. Orwell hints at their simplicity: 'they were frightened to go inside' (p. 15). We see their reverence for the human world in their 'fear of disturbing anything' (p. 15). They tiptoe and whisper, like nervous children. They view the Joneses' home as one of 'unbelievable luxury' (p. 15), rather as the workers must have seen the Tsar's palace after the Russian Revolution. The animals find several hams and bury them: the hams are portions of dead pig. Do you find this comic, or do you sympathise?

The Seven Commandments

Snowball and Napoleon appear to be equal at this point. All the pigs have taught themselves to read, but Snowball is the best writer – just as Trotsky was more of an intellectual than Stalin. Back at the farm buildings, Snowball paints the Seven Commandments of Animalism on the barn wall – with almost no mistakes.

The animals are about to begin the hay harvest, when they are delayed by the cows' needing to be milked. Do you find it convincing that the pigs manage this? When someone asks, 'What is going to happen to all that milk?' (p. 18), we see the beginning of a long-term process of deception. Napoleon brushes the question aside. Notice the mysterious line, 'when they came back in the evening it was noticed that the milk had disappeared' (p. 18). Why do you think Orwell uses the passive voice ('it was noticed')?

Activity 3

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

(a) Reread the account of the fight: 'It was just then... in triumph' (p. 13). How does Orwell create a sense of drama here?

(b) Reread the paragraph describing the animals going to the pasture: 'But they woke at dawn... all their own' (p. 15). How does Orwell convey their feelings?

Activity 4

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Write two or more sentences about Snowball and Napoleon contrasting their characters. You should include evidence.

CHAPTER 3

A socialist utopia

Overcoming difficulties

The animals harvest the hay, with the pigs finding ways to overcome technical difficulties – and supervising the others. Every animal contributes – even the ducks and hens, who gather up 'the very last stalk' (p. 20) – and there is no theft.

Orwell glides over several months: 'All through that summer...' (p. 20). In these early days, the animals are happy. Boxer's strength and determination are vital assets. He represents the unquestioning, hard-working peasant. His answer to setbacks is 'I will work harder!' (p. 20). The farm is a socialist utopia – an ideal community.

The exceptions are Mollie and the cat. They are never described as shirking. Instead, Orwell pretends to share the animals' failure to see through them. The cat's behaviour is 'somewhat peculiar' but it is 'impossible not to believe in her good intentions' (p. 21). Benjamin works, but is unenthusiastic about the Rebellion, speaking of it in a 'cryptic' way (not making his meaning clear).

Meetings and committees

Snowball has turned a tablecloth into a flag, painting on it a hoof and a horn. This is like the Soviet Union's 'hammer and sickle' flag, which represented the union of industrial workers and peasant farmers. Every Sunday the animals raise the flag, then plan their work. However, we start to see conflict appearing between Napoleon and Snowball (echoing that between Stalin and Trotsky).

The pigs are already setting themselves apart. They have claimed the harness-room, and this is where they teach themselves skills like carpentry. Orwell reflects the 'improvement' campaigns launched in the Soviet Union in his amusing list of Animal Committees, such as the 'Clean Tails League for the cows' (p. 22). He is ironically disingenuous in his account of the cat's attempts to 're-educate' the sparrows (p. 23).

The uses of literacy

The pigs read and write perfectly, as does Benjamin, though he considers nothing worth reading. The dogs only read the Seven Commandments – foreshadowing the later use of dogs as Napoleon's enforcers. Orwell is questioning the role of literacy. Muriel only reads newspaper scraps. Mollie is only interested in her own name. Boxer can manage only A, B, C and D, and other animals even less, so Snowball reduces the Seven Commandments to one principle: 'Four legs good, two legs bad' (p. 24). The sheep bleat the new slogan for hours on end, showing its effectiveness.

Where the milk went

Unlike Snowball, Napoleon thinks education of the young is more important than adult education. Accordingly, he takes Jessie and Bluebell's puppies away to raise himself. His keeping them 'in such seclusion that the rest of the farm soon forgot their existence' (p. 25) sounds sinister. What might his intentions be?

In contrast with this secrecy, Orwell is now transparent about the missing milk: 'It was mixed every day into the pigs' mash' (p. 25). The pigs will also receive the windfall apples. Ironically this is the only thing on which Napoleon and Snowball agree. When some animals question this policy, Squealer uses a familiar modern technique of persuasion: scientific 'proof'. He claims that 'brainworkers' need apples and milk to function effectively and he warns that if the pigs fail in their 'duty', Jones will return.

Activity 5

FOCUS ON THEMES

Write a propaganda speech for Squealer, reassuring the animals that everything is going well.

Key quote

"With their superior knowledge it was natural that they should assume the leadership." *Orwell innocently presents the pigs' role as natural (p. 19)*

Key quote

"None of you has ever seen a dead donkey." *What point is Benjamin making? (p. 21)*

Key quote

'Four legs good, two legs bad.' *Snowball's slogan is the ultimate in simple dogma (p. 24)*

Key point

In the Soviet Union, 're-education' was forcible persuasion or indoctrination of political prisoners.

Key point
Orwell merges historical events. Hitler rose to power in the 1930s, a decade after the Russian Civil War.

Activity 6
CHARACTER ANALYSIS
How do Napoleon and Snowball show their different personalities and concerns in this chapter? Either (a) write a paragraph explaining your ideas, or (b) write a statement that might be made by each of them at this point about their contribution to the farm.

Key quote
"There was not an animal on the farm that did not take vengeance on them after his own fashion." *The Battle of the Cowshed (p. 31)*

Key quote
"The only good human being is a dead one." *Snowball (p. 31)*

Key point
Boxer's sadness when he thinks he has killed a stable-lad shows his compassion.

CHAPTER 4

The Battle of the Cowshed

Attempts to spread the revolution

The animals now try to spread the Rebellion, in pursuit of Old Major's vision of an England whose fields are 'trod by beasts alone' (p. 8). Napoleon and Snowball, in rare cooperation, both send out pigeons to spread the word. Jones, meanwhile, spends most of his time in the pub complaining. Other farmers sympathise, but secretly hope to benefit from his plight.

Foxwood, 'a large, neglected, old-fashioned farm' (p. 27), represents Britain, with its empire; its owner, Pilkington, represents Winston Churchill, prime minister during the Second World War. Pinchfield's owner, Frederick, represents Hitler.

Pilkington and Frederick try to ridicule Animal Farm, which they still call Manor Farm. They attempt their own form of propaganda, claiming that its animals are starving, then that they practise cannibalism and torture, and share their females (p. 28). Despite these attempts, stories of the animal utopia spread.

Jones, armed with a gun, is confronted by the animals in the Battle of the Cowshed.

Jones fights back

It is now October, after the harvest. The pigeons warn the animals that Jones and a group of men are coming to retake the farm. The drama is given a hint of comedy by the fact that Snowball has prepared by studying Caesar's military campaigns. The animals are well organised, attacking in waves, led by Snowball, and leading the men into an ambush. Snowball is wounded, while Boxer is seen 'rearing up on his hind legs' to attack the men (p. 30). Even the cat takes part. One sheep dies, but no humans. How might readers' feel at this point if humans were killed?

The animals childishly recount their own brave battle deeds, celebrate victory, and bury the sheep. Snowball, Boxer and the dead sheep are awarded medals. They agree to fire Jones's gun ceremonially twice a year. Interestingly, Napoleon is not mentioned as playing a part in the battle. How do you think this might be used in the narrative later?

Activity 7
NARRATIVE IMPACT
Write an account of the Battle of the Cowshed for a local newspaper that sympathises with *either* the animals or the humans.

Activity 8
CHARACTER ANALYSIS
What do we learn from this chapter about (a) Snowball, (b) Boxer and (c) Mollie?

CHAPTER 5

Napoleon seizes power

Mollie defects

The chapter begins with Mollie, who avoids work and is only interested in her own appearance. Clover has seen one of Pilkington's men stroking her nose, and finds sugar lumps and ribbons – given to her by men – hidden

in her stall. After Mollie disappears, and is spotted pulling 'a smart dogcart' (p. 34) – a lightweight carriage – the other animals never mention her again. Why might this be?

Pig power

It is now a bitterly cold January. No field work can be done, and the pigs spend their time planning. The animals accept that the pigs, being 'manifestly cleverer' than the rest of them (p. 34), should decide farm policy. There is still a theoretical democracy, but the pigs are becoming a ruling class.

The focus shifts to Snowball and Napoleon, who disagree 'at every point where disagreement was possible' (p. 34). Orwell implies that their disagreements are based on rivalry rather than genuine differences. Their conflict divides and confuses the animals too. Snowball is persuasive during debates, but Napoleon excels at 'canvassing support' (p. 35).

The windmill

Napoleon is negative about Snowball's ambitious plan to build a windmill to power a dynamo and supply electricity. Snowball paints a glowing picture of the easy life they will live. Orwell employs his usual gentle irony in listing Snowball's reference books. Books with titles such as *Every Man His Own Bricklayer* are likely to be very basic. How might Orwell be commenting on the Soviet Union's problems?

Snowball becomes engrossed in his plans, which other animals find 'unintelligible but very impressive' (p. 36) – all except Napoleon, who expresses his views by urinating on them. He argues that the animals should focus on food production. The animals divide into factions, only Benjamin remaining cynical about both policies.

Another issue is that Napoleon wants to arm the animals, whereas Snowball wants to spread the Rebellion, arguing that if other farms become Animalist, there will be no threat of attack. Similarly, Trotsky was in favour of promoting worldwide socialism, while Stalin argued for 'Socialism in One Country'.

Napoleon's triumph

Napoleon's opportunity to seize power comes when the animals are to vote on the windmill. Napoleon 'very quietly' says that the windmill is 'nonsense' and that no one should vote for it (p. 38). We might wonder why he makes so little effort to argue, especially when the eloquence of Snowball's 'passionate appeal' wins further support.

Orwell stage-manages this episode masterfully. The enthusiasm for Snowball's promises is interrupted by Napoleon uttering 'a high-pitched whimper of a kind no one had ever heard him utter before' (p. 38). This primes us to expect something extraordinary. Sure enough, the whimper summons the dogs that Napoleon has been secretly training. Snowball barely escapes with his life.

The new regime

The animals are now 'silent and terrified' (p. 39). Only the dogs seem happy, 'bounding back' from their pursuit. They give Napoleon the respect that other dogs gave to Jones: Napoleon has become the new Jones, just as Stalin in a sense became the new Tsar.

Significantly, Napoleon stands where Old Major once stood, and announces that there will be no more Sunday meetings. Now, rather than the animals 'planning' and debating, they will assemble to 'receive their orders' (p. 40). Four young pigs begin to protest, but are silenced by menacing growls from the dogs. Then the slogan bleating of the sheep makes further discussion impossible. Democracy is dead. Squealer explains that the animals cannot be relied on to make the right decisions – unlike Napoleon.

When Napoleon announces that the windmill is to be built after all, the animals are 'somewhat surprised' (p. 42), a subtle Orwellian understatement. Napoleon hints at events to come when he warns of hard work and reduced rations. Squealer, as usual, repackages the facts, telling the animals that the windmill was actually Napoleon's idea: he opposed it simply to rid the farm of the dangerous Snowball.

Activity 9

NARRATIVE IMPACT

Write a paragraph explaining how Orwell manages the dramatic impact of the assembly that leads to Snowball's flight.

Key point

Napoleon gets the sheep to bleat their slogan to interrupt Snowball at key moments.

Key quote

"Vote for Snowball and the three-day week... Vote for Napoleon and the full manger." *Each faction has a slogan (p. 37)*

Key point

Orwell makes the pursuit exciting: Snowball escapes with 'a few inches to spare' (p. 39).

Key quote

"...they wagged their tails to him in the same way as the other dogs had been used to do to Mr Jones." *Napoleon is the new Jones (p. 39)*

Key quote

"His two slogans, 'I will work harder' and 'Napoleon is always right,' seemed to him a sufficient answer to all problems." *Boxer has a simple approach to life (pp. 45–46)*

Key quote

"Are you certain that this is not something that you have dreamed, comrades?" *Squealer exploits the animals' uncertainty (p. 48)*

Key quote

"No animal shall sleep in a bed *with sheets.*" *Muriel finds she was wrong about beds (p. 50)*

Squealer, the master propagandist, rewrites history.

Activity 10

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Analyse how Orwell contrasts Snowball and Napoleon.

CHAPTER 6

Building the windmill

Breaking rocks

The mood of the chapter is set by its opening: 'All that year the animals worked like slaves'. Sunday afternoon work is 'strictly voluntary, but any animal who absented himself from it would have his rations reduced by half' (p. 44). In other words, they can choose whether or not to starve. Yet they are still happy.

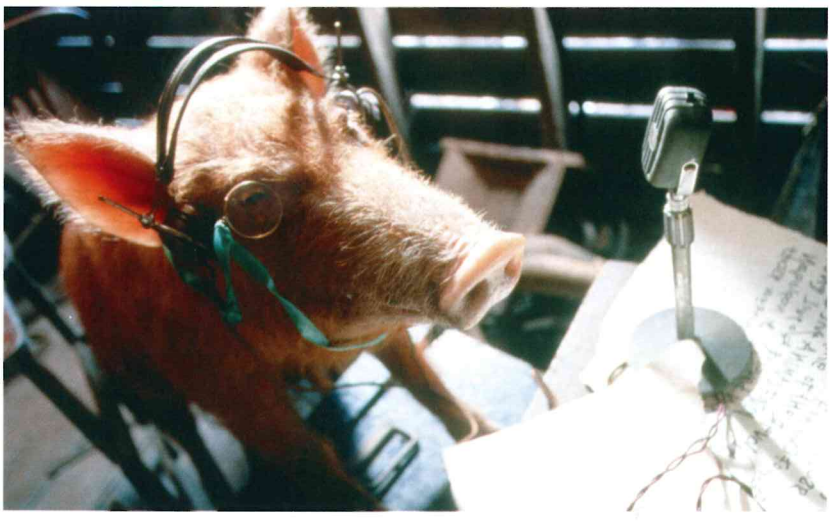
Breaking stones for the windmill is difficult for animals, and back-breaking even when they think of dropping the rocks from the top of the quarry. Once again Boxer is heroic in his determination. The animals remain positive.

Trading with humans

It is a major step when Napoleon announces that the farm will now trade with neighbouring farms. They will therefore sell some hay and part of the wheat crop. He also warns that it may be necessary to sell the hens' eggs.

The changes creep up on the animals so that they can never be sure of what is happening. They are 'conscious of a vague uneasiness' (p. 47) about trading with humans. The narrative viewpoint takes us inside their heads: they think they remember that dealing with humans, trade, and money were outlawed, but they cannot be certain. When four young pigs protest, they are, once again, silenced by growling dogs, then by bleating sheep. Napoleon reassures them that he will deal with the humans. Squealer tells the animals that no resolutions against trade and money were ever passed.

Mr Whymper is paid to arrange deals for Animal Farm. The animals fear him, but feel pride when they see Napoleon giving him orders. Meanwhile, other humans are convinced that Animal Farm will fail. Nonetheless, they grudgingly accept the name 'Animal Farm'.



Pigs in blankets

It is another step away from Animalism when the pigs move into the farmhouse. Squealer dismisses the animals' vague doubts about this, adding that the pigs need a quiet place to work, and a more fitting residence for the 'Leader' – Napoleon. The animals are uneasy when they hear that the pigs now sleep in beds. Clover asks Muriel to read out the Fourth Commandment. The rule about beds, however, has been amended.

Squealer, as usual, provides a reinterpretation, explaining that the rule was against sheets, not beds. The pigs sleep in blankets – which is quite acceptable. He finishes as usual with: 'Surely none of you wishes to see Jones back?' (p. 50). We see how the animals gradually cease to question their 'rulers': when they hear that the pigs will now get up an hour later, 'no complaint was made about that either' (p. 50).

Disaster strikes the windmill

The animals are still united in their great work – the windmill – but Orwell prepares us for disaster: 'November came, with raging south-west winds' (p. 51). The autumn winds worsen, and one night the hens all dream of a gun going off. This prepares us further for two dramatically simple sentences: 'A terrible sight had met their eyes. The windmill was in ruins' (p. 51).

The disaster unifies the animals even more: 'With one accord they dashed down to the spot' (p. 51). Even Napoleon runs. However,

he immediately capitalises on the disaster by blaming Snowball. Orwell shows how people can be manipulated into believing in a common enemy. What advantage does this have for Napoleon?

Activity 11

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

Analyse how Orwell's language prepares us, creates suspense, and conveys the importance of the windmill's collapse in the paragraph beginning 'November came...' (p. 51).

Activity 12

FOCUS ON THEMES

Write a paragraph about how this chapter develops the theme of propaganda.

CHAPTER 7

Mutiny, confession and reprisals

The spectre of famine

It is now the second winter since the Rebellion. Orwell begins with an account of the bitter weather which makes rebuilding the windmill so hard. Hardship is taking its toll on the animals. The weather makes for 'cruel work' and the animals feel less hopeful (p. 54), though they are still inspired by Boxer.

The animals' food supplies grow thin, especially when most of the potato crop proves inedible because the animals have not protected it from frost. For the pigs, concealing shortages from the humans is as important as feeding the animals. Orwell presents the Soviet Union's international propaganda in the account of how Napoleon makes the humans think the animals are well fed. He has the food bins filled with sand, with a thin layer of feed on top, so that Whymper reports an apparent abundance to the outside world.

The hens' revolt

Napoleon agrees, through Whymper, to sell 400 eggs a week. The hens raise 'a terrible outcry' (p. 56), claiming that to remove their eggs at this time of year would be murder. In protest, they lay their eggs on the rafters, so they smash on the floor. Napoleon reacts decisively, denying them food until they give in. Nine hens die, but Napoleon is able to deliver the promised eggs.

Selling the timber

Just as Stalin gradually began to trade with non-Communist countries, so Napoleon negotiates with nearby farms. His approach to selling the timber is revealing. He favours Pilkington and Frederick in turn. Snowball is always said to be hiding with whichever farmer is currently out of favour (p. 57). This parallels Stalin's wavering between Germany and Britain at the start of the Second World War.

Orwell develops what could be called the 'demonisation' of Snowball: Napoleon uses propaganda to turn his old rival into a common enemy. This deflects any dissatisfaction with Napoleon's regime, and frightens the animals into obedience, making Napoleon their 'protector'.

The animals not only believe in the propaganda, but add to it: 'The cows declared unanimously that Snowball crept into their stalls and milked them in their sleep' (pp. 57–58). Encouraging this belief, Napoleon mounts an investigation, claiming that he can smell Snowball all over the farm.

Squealer takes this pretence even further, announcing that Snowball has sold himself to Frederick. Snowball is even said to have been 'Jones's secret agent all the time' (pp. 58–59). When even Boxer questions how this can be possible when Snowball 'fought bravely at the Battle of the Cowshed' (p. 59), Squealer glibly explains that this was all part of Snowball's deception, and that in fact he fled from the battle. Uncharacteristically, Boxer still argues that Snowball was 'a good comrade' (p. 60). It is only when Squealer slowly tells him that Napoleon has clearly stated otherwise that Boxer gives in.

The purges begin

Orwell warns us about the coming terror, at the same time engaging our sympathy: the animals cower before Napoleon, sensing '... that some terrible thing was about to happen' (p. 61). Napoleon uses his strange, high-pitched whimper to summon the dogs, who drag four

Key quote

"They were always cold, and usually hungry as well. Only Boxer and Clover never lost heart." *(p. 54)*

Key point

In the Soviet Union, food shortages were partly caused by Stalin making the peasants grow crops with which they were inexperienced.

Key point

There were revolts in post-Revolution Russia against the collectivisation of farms, whereby farmers had to hand over all their produce to the state.

Key point

Stalin had Trotsky written out of accounts of the Russian Revolution and removed from photographs (see p. 19). Orwell condemned the BBC's acceptance of this policy.

pigs to him. Unexpectedly, three dogs then attack Boxer. It is a moment of dramatic irony when Boxer pins one to the ground, then looks to Napoleon to know whether he should crush the dog, unaware that the dogs were following Napoleon's orders.

The four terrified pigs confess to imaginary crimes. Rather than being shown mercy for confessing, they have their throats ripped out – as do the hens who led the egg revolt, a goose who confesses to stealing corn, and a sheep who urinated in the drinking pool.

The extent of the slaughter seems huge, and the remaining animals are 'shaken and miserable' (p. 62). This is the first time any animal has killed another, breaking another commandment. The animals, except the pigs and dogs, gather together round the motherly Clover. The next two paragraphs are written partly from her viewpoint. Significantly, the animals survey the farm from the same little knoll where they were once so happy (p. 15). The farm looks more beautiful than ever, yet everything has changed.

Orwell presents us with what Clover might have said, had she been articulate. The recent scenes of terror and slaughter were not what she had hoped for at the time of the Rebellion. Yet even now, it does not occur to her to reject the pigs' authority. She leads a mournful singing of 'Beasts of England', but a new blow comes when Squealer announces that the song is now banned.

Minimus's song replacing 'Beasts of England' exchanges the dream of a countrywide republic with loyalty to Animal Farm, reflecting Stalin's 'socialism in one country' policy.

Activity 13

NARRATIVE IMPACT

(a) What is your response to the animals confessing to mostly imaginary crimes? Can you think of any explanation for their confessions?
(b) How successful do you find Orwell's voicing of Clover's thoughts? Explain your views.

Activity 14

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

How does Orwell show that Animal Farm is still beautiful in the paragraph beginning 'The animals huddled...' (p. 62)?

Key quote

"...the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet" *(p. 62)*

Key quote

"...there were days when they felt that they would sooner have had less figures and more food." *The animals cannot eat statistics (p. 67)*

Key point

The cult of Napoleon echoes that of totalitarian leaders like Stalin, Hitler and the later Chinese leader Mao Zedong.

Key point

Stalin attempted to make a treaty with Britain (Churchill is represented by Pilkington) but in the end resorted to a non-aggression pact with Hitler (represented by Frederick).

CHAPTER 8

The windmill is destroyed

The cult of Napoleon

A few days after the executions, it occurs to some animals that the Sixth Commandment said 'No animal shall kill any other animal'. However, they find that in fact it ends with the words '*without cause*' (p. 66). Similarly, when they suspect that they work longer hours now, and for no more food, than in Jones's day, Squealer's statistics 'prove' otherwise.

On Napoleon's rare public appearances he is accompanied by a cockerel who announces him, and by his dogs. He eats alone on fine dinner plates, waited on by dogs. He is personally given credit now for all the farm's successes, and Minimus's poem praises him as godlike (p. 68).

Trading with humans

Orwell switches to the more sordid business of Napoleon selling timber. At the same time, three hens are executed for plotting with Snowball to murder Napoleon. New measures are taken to protect him. This may reflect wartime plots to assassinate Hitler.

Napoleon continues to court first Pilkington, then Frederick. There are rumours that Frederick plans to attack Animal Farm. Napoleon claims that he never contemplated selling Frederick the timber. It therefore surprises the animals when he does, and when he insults Pilkington, and replaces the slogan 'Death to Frederick' with 'Death to Pilkington' (p. 72). Napoleon's apparent change of mind is presented as tactical. The animals think he has been clever. How do you regard this episode?

Meanwhile there have been more claims of Snowball's attempts to ruin Animal Farm, coupled with Squealer's assertion that Snowball was never given a medal for bravery at the Battle of the Cowshed, and was in fact censured for cowardice. There is cause for celebration when the windmill is finally completed, but the animals' belief that 'Nothing short of explosives would lay them low this time!' (p. 71) is ominous.

The pigs celebrate victory in the Battle of the Windmill.

The timber episode reaches a climax when Napoleon, being 'too clever' to accept a cheque, insists on bank-notes – only to find he has been given forgeries. Similarly, Stalin discovered that Hitler's non-aggression pact was not worth the paper it was written on when Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941.

Frederick attacks Animal Farm the next day. His men are armed and manage to secure the 'whole of the big pasture' (p. 74) – a parallel to Hitler's occupation of the Soviet Union. Napoleon's appeal to Pilkington is snubbed, but worse is yet to come. Benjamin sees that the men are about to blow up the windmill but he merely observes 'I thought so', 'with an air almost of amusement' (p. 74).

The destruction of the windmill, however, could be seen as counter-productive for the men, because it provokes the animals to a final defence. Boxer breaks the heads of three men. Another is gored by a cow. However, the fighting seems more comic than lethal when we read that 'another had his trousers nearly torn off by Jessie and Bluebell' (p. 75).

A gun is fired to celebrate what Squealer calls a victory – though Boxer is unconvinced.

The pigs discover alcohol

The battle has a lighter aftermath. The pigs discover a case of whisky and get drunk – though, for comic effect, Orwell does not make this explicit, instead providing glimpses of the pigs' drunken behaviour. The next day they have terrible hangovers. Napoleon thinks he is dying, and, as his 'last act upon earth', bans alcohol (p. 78).

Orwell also employs comic understatement when he reveals that a week later Napoleon orders a field to be sown with barley – the basic ingredient of both beer and whisky. Muriel realises that the animals have mis-remembered another commandment. The Fifth actually reads: 'No animal shall drink alcohol *to excess*.'

Activity 15

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

How does Minimus's poem (p. 68) compare with the words of 'Beasts of England' (p. 8)?

Activity 16

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

What do you think of Benjamin's role so far, particularly in this chapter? What sort of person, allegorically, does he represent?

CHAPTER 9

Boxer's last load

Life gets tougher – except for the pigs and dogs

Although Boxer's split hoof causes him pain, he works as hard as ever. He assumes that he

Key quote

"In the general rejoicings the unfortunate affair of the bank-notes was forgotten." *War may benefit a leader's reputation, as it did Stalin's (p. 77)*

Key quote

"Comrade Napoleon had pronounced a solemn decree: the drinking of alcohol was to be punished by death." *Napoleon reacts badly to a hangover! (p. 78)*

Key point

The pigs break all of the Seven Commandments. For 4–7 they alter the wording painted on the barn. Look out for the remaining two.

Key quote

"They knew that life nowadays was harsh and bare, that they were often hungry and often cold, and that they were usually working when they were not asleep. But doubtless it had been worse in the old days." *(p. 81)*

Key point
Enforced public demonstrations of loyalty and unity are a feature of totalitarian regimes.

Key point
Stalin outlawed religion, but many Russians still held Christian beliefs. Stalin tolerated this to some extent, especially during the Second World War.

Key point
Karl Marx called religion 'the opium of the people', meaning that it eased their suffering by offering illusions. He said it had to be abolished for people to find real happiness.

will retire next year. Life is hard for most of the animals. The pigs and dogs eat as much as ever, but everyone else has what Squealer calls 'a readjustment' – a reduction – of their ration (p. 81). As ever, his statistics show that they are better off in every way than in Jones's day.

Nonetheless, there are more and more mouths to feed, because Napoleon has fathered 31 piglets. A schoolroom is to be built for them. Napoleon personally instructs them, and they are discouraged from playing with other young animals. The separation between the pigs and other animals widens when it is ruled that they must now step aside for pigs, and that pigs can wear green ribbons on their tails on Sundays. Can you picture this?

The farm needs more money, so more eggs are sold, and rations are cut again in February. The animals are further disappointed when they discover that a delicious aroma of cooking barley only means that the pigs are brewing beer for themselves. Napoleon now drinks four pints daily, served to him in the farmhouse's best soup tureen.

The dignity of labour

The animals still feel that their lives have dignity, partly thanks to the increase in songs, speeches and processions. Napoleon has commanded that there will now be a 'Spontaneous Demonstration', which ironically happens every week at 'the appointed time' (p. 83). The animals process round the farm behind Napoleon. Boxer and Clover carry a banner with the words 'Long live Comrade Napoleon!' (p. 83), and there are readings of poems and statistics.

On the April day that Animal Farm becomes a Republic, with Napoleon as President, it is also announced that newly 'discovered' documents prove that Snowball actually fought openly for Jones at the Battle of the Cowshed, and that his wounds were 'inflicted by Napoleon's teeth' (p. 84). Orwell is showing how totalitarian regimes continually rewrite history. Do you think they are ever justified?

Moses the raven returns after years, and talks about the animals going to Sugarcandy Mountain when they die. Many believe him, reasoning that this would be a just reward for their hardships. Why do you think the pigs tolerate him, even giving him a beer?

Work rebuilding the windmill is too much for Boxer, who finally collapses.

Boxer's decline

Boxer's hoof heals, but he looks less glossy, and his 'great haunches seemed to have shrunken' (p. 85). He ignores the warnings of Clover and Benjamin against overwork – which prime the reader for what is to come. Orwell gives a further warning: '...something had happened to Boxer' (p. 86). Then we see the poignant picture of Boxer 'unable even to raise his head'. Typically, he is uncomplaining, but hopes he can now retire, with Benjamin.

Squealer tells the other animals that Boxer will be taken to a vet. However, when the van comes, Benjamin, for the first time ever, gallops to fetch the other animals. He has probably already seen the words on the van revealing that it belongs to a 'Horse Slaughterer and Glue Boiler' (p. 88). The animals urge Boxer to break out, but he lacks the strength. Could Benjamin have saved him?

Days later, Squealer reports that Boxer has died in hospital. He even invents a touching death scene to show Boxer's enduring loyalty. He dismisses the rumours that Boxer was slaughtered, explaining that the vet had bought the van from a horse slaughterer. Are you surprised that the animals seem so gullible?

There is a final twist to Boxer's tale: Napoleon promises a banquet in his honour. Instead, 'a large wooden crate' arrives. Do you find it comic or sinister that 'from somewhere or other the pigs had acquired the money to buy themselves another case of whisky' (p. 91)?

Activity 17

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Sum up Boxer's contributions to Animal Farm.

Activity 18

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

How does Orwell present Boxer in the passage from 'Late one evening...' to '...be a companion to me' (p. 86)?

CHAPTER 10

Pigs and men

Years pass

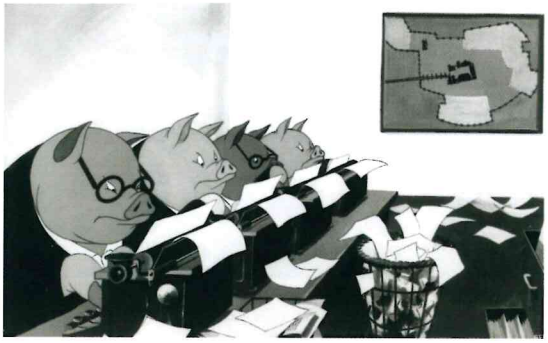
It is as if Orwell is now writing in summary. This is in keeping with the overall sense of the novel being a 'fairy tale'. Many of the animals have died, and few remember the pre-Rebellion days, or even Boxer. The farm is said to be 'more prosperous now', and 'enlarged by two fields which had been bought from Mr Pilkington' (p. 93). Allegorically, this could anticipate the enlarging of the Soviet Union that resulted from the carving up of Europe after the Second World War.

Orwell summarises the farm's technological improvements. These could refer to the gradual strengthening of the Soviet Union. The pigs and dogs are now more numerous, corresponding to the growth of the Communist Party elite and the KGB under Stalin. The pigs and dogs are an increasing burden on the others. Yet Squealer's statistics continue to persuade them that they are better off than ever.

Hope, dignity and equality

The animals still have a 'sense of honour and privilege' (p. 94). They are proud that they do not take orders from humans, and they continue to believe that one day the original 'Beasts of England' dream will come true.

We return to a more immediate narrative with Squealer teaching the sheep a new 'song'. After they come back, Orwell anticipates the next step in the political evolution of the pigs by describing Clover's 'terrified neighing' (p. 96), which he explains in a separate paragraph, to underline its significance: 'It was a pig walking on his hind legs' (p. 96). The second one-liner,



Brainworkers covering sheets of paper with writing.

describing Napoleon, is equally significant: 'He carried a whip in his trotter' (p. 96). In accordance with this, there is now just one commandment: 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others' (p. 97). It is beyond Clover to realise that this is logically impossible.

Humans visit Animal Farm

Now that the pigs can walk upright, neighbouring farmers visit and admire their achievements. Orwell describes the visit from the 'lower' animals' perspective: '...loud laughter and bursts of singing came from the farmhouse' (p. 98). We also 'see' through the window with them, observing pigs and humans socialising.

Pilkington expresses friendship towards the 'respected proprietors of Animal Farm' (p. 99). He particularly admires the 'discipline' and 'orderliness' of the 'lower animals' (pp. 99–100). Napoleon's speech in response reveals a complete abandonment of socialist (or 'Animalist') principles. This is symbolised by his restoration of the farm's old name – The Manor Farm.

The novel ends with discord: already Napoleon and Pilkington have fallen out over cards. However, to the 'lower animals', the pigs and men have become indistinguishable.

Activity 19

NARRATIVE IMPACT

How would you sum up the novel's final message, and how do you respond to it?

Activity 20

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

How does Orwell portray the pigs' transformation in the paragraph beginning 'After that...' (pp. 97–98)?

Key quote

"....large sheets of paper which had to be closely covered with writing, and as soon as they were so covered they were burnt in the furnace." *Orwell satirises communist bureaucracy (p. 94)*

Key point

Orwell uses biting satire in the paragraph beginning 'After that...' using the device of beginning three sentences with 'It did not seem strange ...', to list the pigs' new luxuries (pp. 97–98).

Key quote

"Four legs good, two legs *better!*" *The sheep have a new 'song' (p. 97)*

Key point

Pilkington congratulates Napoleon on subjugating the 'lower animals'.

Key quote

"...already it was impossible to say which was which." *The 'socialist' pigs have become exactly like the capitalist humans (p. 102)*

Characters

The characters in *Animal Farm* are those of a fable: they are not fully three-dimensional. Individually, however, they could be seen as displaying particular personality traits. They also represent historical characters or types.

Old Major

Old Major represents both Marx and Lenin. He is wise, benevolent and respected. He shares his ideas and his dream, and lists rules, later formulated as the Seven Commandments, for avoiding the evils of humanity. He argues that 'The life of an animal is misery and slavery' (p. 4) because of human oppression.

Old Major's speech echoes the style and teachings of Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), co-written with Friedrich Engels. Major points out that humans do little for themselves, yet exploit animals. Ironically, his prediction that Boxer will be slaughtered comes true, but under the rule of the pigs.

Activity 1

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

How would the lyrics of 'Beasts of England' appeal to the animals?

Napoleon

Napoleon represents Stalin. He is 'not much of a talker' but has 'a reputation for getting his own way' (p. 10) and for having depth of character. At first, he and Snowball work as a

Key point

Napoleon is named after Napoleon Bonaparte, the military leader who championed the French Revolution (1789) and equality, but eventually became Emperor.

Napoleon – 'father of all animals' – upright, clothed and wearing his medals.

team. They break into the farmhouse together, and Napoleon orders paint to be fetched, so that Snowball can paint the name 'Animal Farm'.

We soon learn that Napoleon is quick-thinking, devious and deceptive, as well as authoritative, when he tells the animals not to worry about the milk. He is also capable of secrecy and long-term planning: he trains the puppies to become his personal guard and to enforce his rule.

Napoleon's rivalry with Snowball is bitter, and personal. He shows his contempt for Snowball's plans to build a windmill by urinating on them, and he sets his dogs on Snowball. He displays even greater ruthlessness when he has them rip out the throats of animals confessing to imaginary crimes. He even orders his dogs to kill Boxer, for questioning his propaganda. When Boxer collapses, Napoleon has him slaughtered, and spends the money on whisky.

Napoleon's deviousness is most developed in his scapegoating of the absent Snowball. With Squealer's help, he persuades the animals to believe improbable lies about Snowball's crimes, claiming that he can smell him everywhere – 'proof' that Snowball visits the farm at night. Snowball is blamed for all the pigs' failures. According to Napoleon, he wrecks the windmill out of 'sheer malignity' (p. 52), and to get revenge.

Napoleon is a sinister and frightening figure, but Orwell also makes him ridiculous. He dithers over the timber sale, is duped by Frederick, then is snubbed by Pilkington. He is also comic when drunk, as when he is 'distinctly seen' galloping around in an old bowler hat (p. 78). His belief, next morning, that he is dying is also ludicrous, especially when followed by his plans for a brewery.

As Napoleon becomes established, his vanity is revealed, encouraged by the flattery of pigs like Minimus, who invent honorific titles for him, such as 'Father of All Animals' (p. 67). He awards himself medals, and claims to have saved the day at the Battle of the Cowshed. His pompous processions and wearing of Jones's clothes are absurd. When he first walks upright, he casts 'haughty glances from side to side' (p. 96).

Activity 2

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Imagine that you have discovered Napoleon's secret memoir. Write a section recording his thoughts and feelings about either Snowball or the executions (Chapter 7).

Snowball

Snowball represents Trotsky. At first, Snowball works with Napoleon, and is even more prominent because he is so intelligent, imaginative and articulate. It is Snowball who writes up the Seven Commandments on the barn, and who encourages the animals to learn to read. Like Trotsky, Snowball is an able military tactician, masterminding the ambush at the Battle of the Cowshed, and fighting bravely himself. He is also 'indefatigable' in organising 'Animal Committees' (p. 22). However, he is more successful in his use of propaganda, showing ability to relate to less intelligent animals with his 'single maxim': 'Four legs good, two legs bad' (p. 24). He shows mental agility when he reassures the birds that a wing is 'an organ of propulsion and not manipulation. It should therefore be regarded as a leg' (p. 24).

Snowball's intellect, however, is his downfall. He focuses so intently on technological schemes gleaned from *Farmer and Stockbreeder* magazine, that he fails to suspect Napoleon's plans to seize power. He is also unaware of Napoleon's secret training of the dogs.

After Snowball's exile, Napoleon's propaganda version of him takes over. This false Snowball is almost more important than the real one – who disappears without trace.

Activity 3

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Do you think Snowball would have made a better leader than Napoleon? Explain your views.

Squealer

Squealer's name suggests that he will be heard, but that he lacks dignity. He is a 'brilliant talker' (p. 10) with a 'very persuasive' manner (p. 11). He helps to work out the principles of Animalism, and becomes the regime's propaganda chief. After Snowball is ousted, Squealer becomes the second most important

Key quote

"Never mind the milk, comrades!... That will be attended to. The harvest is more important." *Napoleon manipulates the animals (p. 18)*

Key point

Orwell makes Napoleon more sinister by revealing his character only by his few words, his actions, by rumours, and through Squealer.

Key quote

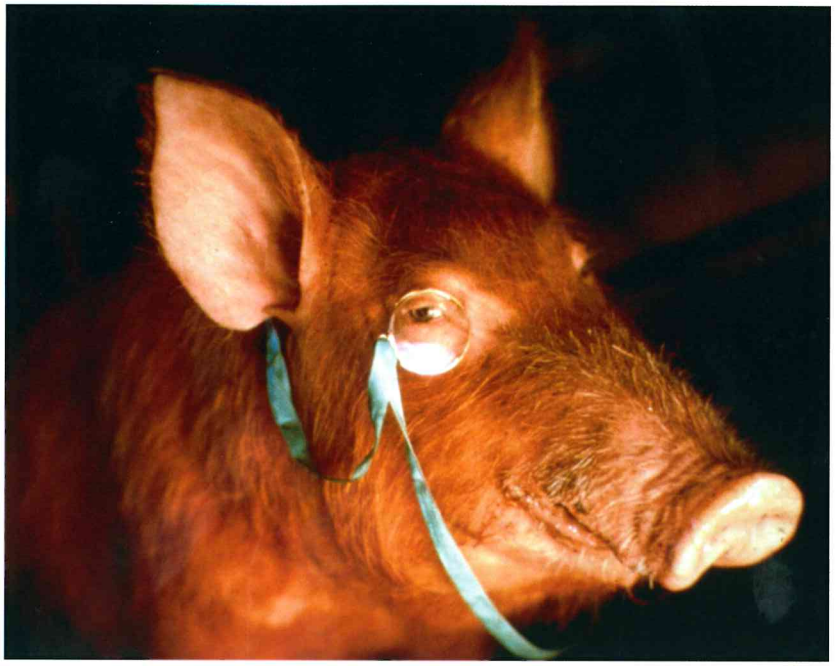
"The distinguishing mark of Man is the *hand*, the instrument with which he does all his mischief." *Snowball explains (p. 24)*

Key point

Trotsky was exiled to Turkey in 1929, then lived for periods in France and Norway, before being deported to Mexico, where Stalin had him assassinated in 1940.

Key quote

"Surely, comrades... there is no one among you who wants to see Jones come back?" *This is Squealer's stock response to doubters (p. 26)*



Squealer repeatedly convinces the animals that life is better than it was under Jones.

pig. Do you think he is simply a mouthpiece for Napoleon's ideas?

Squealer uses various techniques to persuade and control (see page 18, under 'Propaganda'). All show his intelligence, his ability to exploit weaknesses, his cynical callousness, and his disregard for the truth. On the one occasion when his reinvention of history is challenged, we see the real menace lurking behind his charm: 'he cast a very ugly look at Boxer with his little twinkling eyes' (p. 60).

Activity 4

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Which, in your view, are Squealer's most persuasive techniques? Explain your choices.

Key quote

"Benjamin could read as well as any pig, but never exercised his faculty." *(p. 23)*

Boxer

Boxer represents the hard-working Russian peasant. He is kind, taking care not to tread on smaller animals, and sad when he thinks he has killed a stable-boy. He is also incredibly loyal. He is not intelligent enough to see how he and other animals are manipulated, and he even fails to understand that it is on Napoleon's orders that three dogs attack him. However, this attack is the result of his arguing against Squealer's propaganda – the only time any character does this.

Boxer's answer to all problems is to work harder. Even after the horror of Napoleon's executions, he reaffirms this, and goes off to drag back more stone. When he collapses, his sole concern is that the other animals should be able to finish the windmill.

Key quote

"If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right." *Boxer is unquestioningly loyal (p. 41)*

Key point

Boxer is literally 'knackered' to use the colloquial word that stems from 'knacker', a horse slaughterer: he is exhausted to the point of death.

Activity 5

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Is Boxer a tragic figure, or a pathetic one? Weigh up the arguments.

Benjamin

Boxer's friend Benjamin the donkey represents people who understand that evil is being done, yet do nothing about it. Benjamin does not put his intelligence to any use. He also speaks cryptically, rather than trying to inform the other animals. He hints that his long life has enabled him to observe that nothing ever really changes. Is he right?

Benjamin makes cynical remarks – for example, that 'God had given him a tail to keep the flies off, but that he would sooner have had no tail and no flies' (p. 2). What does this suggest about his attitude to God?

Benjamin is finally faced with the effect of his disengagement from events when Boxer is taken to be slaughtered. For once, Benjamin is stirred to action – he gallops to fetch the other animals; but it is too late.

Clover

The caring and motherly Clover protects the ducklings, and speaks firmly to Mollie rather than reporting her. She warns Boxer against overwork, and treats his split hoof with herbal poultices. She has enough intelligence to suspect that the Seven Commandments are being broken, but not enough to see that the pigs are changing them. Her tolerant attitude makes her easy for Squealer to manipulate. The nearest she comes to questioning is when, after the executions, Orwell comments from her viewpoint: '...this was not what they had aimed at... years ago.' Yet there is 'no thought of rebellion or disobedience in her mind' (p. 64).

Activity 6

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Compare the roles of Benjamin and Clover in their responses to the Rebellion and later events.

Mollie

Mollie represents the Russian nobility who wanted to carry on living lives of frivolous pleasure. Her main concern is whether she will still have sugar lumps and ribbons. When the animals enter the farmhouse, she is found holding some ribbon up and admiring herself in a mirror. When she runs away she returns to a life in which she is petted, but still owned.

Muriel

Muriel the goat is intelligent but lazy. She reads out the Seven Commandments, but does not notice or comment on how they have been changed. She mostly reads scraps of news she finds on the rubbish tip.

Moses

Moses represents the Russian Orthodox Church, which supported the Tsar and was outlawed by Lenin. He talks enticingly about Sugarcandy Mountain – animal heaven. His return after some years reflects Christian belief creeping back into the Soviet Union, and its partial toleration during the Second World War.

The dogs

The dogs have little independent character. Jessie and Bluebell chase rats and wag their tails to Jones. Napoleon's trained dogs are fiercely loyal to him, and are happy to rip out the throats of any animal on his orders. They represent Stalin's secret police, the KGB. Without them, Napoleon could not enforce his rule.

The sheep

Orwell's sheep are unintelligent, unquestioning followers. They represent the easily fooled, obedient masses. However, they have a role in Napoleon's defeat of Snowball, as he gets them to bleat during Snowball's speeches. Squealer teaches them the slogan 'Four legs good, two legs bad!' This later becomes 'Four legs good, two legs *better*!' when the pigs walk upright (p. 97).

The humans

The humans represent the leaders of European countries, and their responses to the Russian Revolution. Jones is lazy, inefficient and uncaring – Orwell's view of Tsar Nicholas II. Pilkington represents Churchill, prime minister of Britain. He is a 'gentleman-farmer', which points to Churchill's background. Frederick is more efficient but cruel. His tricking of Napoleon, followed by his attack on Animal Farm, parallel Hitler's betrayal of his non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in 1941.

The humans lose their distinct identities in the final chapter, but they all feel that Animal Farm no longer presents an ideological threat, since Napoleon exploits his 'lower animals' even more than the human farmers do.

Activity 7

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(a) How far do Jones, Pilkington and Frederick have distinct characters?

(b) How effective do you find Orwell's presentation of the humans?

Key quote

"...a society of animals set free from hunger and the whip, all equal, each working according to his capacity, the strong protecting the weak"

Clover reflects on her old hopes (p. 64)

Men and pigs join together to toast the future of Manor Farm in the 1984 Peter Hall adaptation at the National Theatre.

Themes

Power

According to Marx, power in an industrial society lies with whoever controls the means of production. The workers have to seize this from the ruling elite. This is why in *Animal Farm* the Rebellion begins with food, and why, later, there is emphasis on how much food the farm produces – as 'proven' by Squealer's statistics.

Key point

Initially, Jones and his men hold the power. They literally have 'the whip hand': the whip, held first by Napoleon, then by the other pigs, becomes a symbol of power and coercion.

Orwell explores several aspects of power:

- how it can be seized from a ruling elite;
- how individuals become dictators;
- the role of force in political power;
- the role of propaganda and indoctrination;
- how people allow themselves to be controlled.

Any ruling elite needs to be backed by force. A decisive factor in the Russian Revolution was that rank-and-file soldiers, disillusioned by the First World War, joined the revolutionaries. In *Animal Farm*, all the animals fight for the Rebellion. Later, Napoleon has his dogs – like Stalin's KGB – who enable his rule of terror.

A dictator gathers an elite who support him because it is in their interests. In *Animal Farm* this elite is represented by the other pigs, particularly Squealer. The dogs obey the pigs, but, like them, receive full rations when the other animals have theirs cut.

Dictators also use mobs. Hitler stirred up the masses to support him and threaten his opponents. Napoleon has the sheep, whose bleating of slogans drowns out any possible complaint, as when the pigs begin to walk upright (p. 97).

Activity 1

FOCUS ON THEMES

Do you think Orwell wants us to believe that power always corrupts, or that only corrupt people become powerful – or neither? Explain your ideas.

Propaganda

Orwell first explores this theme through Old Major's speech and his song 'Beasts of England'. These use persuasive techniques, and hold out more hope than is justified, but they contain no lies. With Snowball, too, propaganda is seen as more helpful than harmful. Animalism's Seven Commandments help the animals to avoid becoming like humans. Even Snowball's simplified slogan 'Four legs good, two legs bad' (p. 24) helps the less intelligent animals.

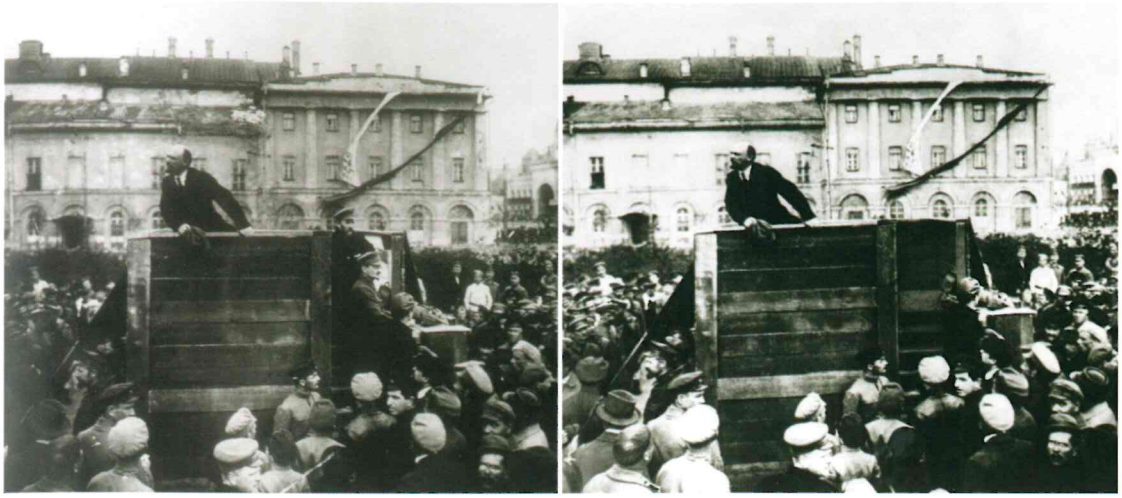
With Squealer, propaganda becomes a means of manipulation and control. At times he tells complete lies – for example, that the windmill was Napoleon's idea. He also uses statistics. Whether or not these have a basis in reality, he knows the animals will have to accept his interpretation of them. At other times, Squealer twists half-truths, as when he claims that Snowball 'fled' at the Battle of the Cowshed (p. 60). He did – to lead the men into an ambush.

Squealer's most callous and cynical lies are about Boxer. He claims that Boxer will be treated by a vet, then convinces the animals that the vet bought his van from the knacker, which is why it still says 'Horse Slaughterer and Glue Boiler' on its side (p. 88). He embellishes the lie by protesting 'indignantly, whisking his tail and skipping from side to side' (p. 90) that 'their beloved Leader, Comrade Napoleon' would never behave so badly. Worse, he invents a death-bed scene in which Boxer's last words are 'Napoleon is always right' (p. 90).

Activity 2

FOCUS ON THEMES

What lessons can we learn about propaganda from *Animal Farm* that might still be relevant in our society today?



Under Stalin, Soviet history was constantly rewritten. The left-hand image shows Lenin addressing a crowd, with Trotsky on the steps to the podium. The right-hand image has been doctored – Trotsky has disappeared.

Equality and elitism

Communism is founded on the principle of equality. In the earliest days of the Rebellion, the animals are presented as sharing ownership of the farm, debating and voting at Sunday assemblies, and having equal food rations. However, this begins to change early on, with Napoleon's appropriation of the cows' milk (p. 18), and then the windfall apples. Even at the assemblies, it is only the pigs who 'put forward the resolutions' (p. 22).

Equality is gradually eroded in favour of elitism. Squealer eloquently persuades the animals that the pigs, as 'brain workers' (p. 25), need the milk and apples in order to function well for the benefit of all. Later, when the farm is struggling, the ordinary animals have their rations cut, while the growing numbers of pigs and dogs still eat their fill.

The Sunday Meetings are democratic, so after Snowball's downfall Napoleon abolishes them. All decisions will now be made by 'a special committee of pigs, presided over by himself' (p. 39). This corresponds to power being held by Stalin and his inner circle.

Further steps towards elitism are taken when the pigs move into the farmhouse, start to sleep in beds, and to get up an hour later than the other animals. These are all luxuries, but the rules stating that other animals must step aside for them, and that pigs can wear green ribbons on their tails on Sundays, clearly point to their higher status. In the end, the dream of equality ends in the illogical new slogan: 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others' (p. 97).

Activity 3

FOCUS ON THEMES

As you see it, what obstacles to social equality does *Animal Farm* present, and how?

Education and literacy

In *Animal Farm* there is a thin line between education and indoctrination – teaching a particular set of political views. Old Major's doctrine is that humans are oppressors and must be overthrown. Another aspect of education in the novel is technical: the pigs teach themselves skills like carpentry and bricklaying from Jones's books, and Snowball uses books to learn about military strategy and windmills.

Snowball wants animals to be literate so they can understand the Seven Commandments. The pigs never encourage the other animals to expand their reading. If their reading improved, they might realise that the pigs were changing the commandments. Orwell represents the misuse of literacy in Muriel, who reads without discrimination, and in Benjamin who cynically dismisses the idea that anything is worth reading.

To Napoleon, the purpose of education is indoctrination. He has a schoolroom built for his piglets, and presumably will teach them to regard themselves as superior to other animals.

Activity 4

FOCUS ON THEMES

(a) In what ways is education presented as a positive thing in *Animal Farm*?

(b) What, in your view, is particularly lacking in the animals' education?

Key quote

"Milk and apples (this has been proved by Science, comrades) contain substances absolutely necessary to the well-being of a pig." *Squealer exploits the animals' ignorance (p. 25)*

Key point

When the pigs begin to carry whips, like Jones, they are placed firmly in the role of oppressors.

Structure & style

The narrative framework

Orwell structures the plot in several ways:

- it loosely follows the events of the Russian Revolution;
- the pigs break all Seven Commandments;
- he refers to the seasons in every chapter except Chapter 1;
- it rises to a dramatic climax with the executions (Chapter 7);
- events are juxtaposed, such as the two battles;
- events come full circle, the pigs becoming the new oppressors.

Stalin and the Seven Commandments

Orwell conveys the overall idea of Stalin's betrayal, but rearranges events. The more obvious framework is that of the pigs breaking each of the Seven Commandments, and, in the cases of Commandments 4–7, amending them to suit themselves. This tracks their gradual abandonment of the principles of Animalism – or, allegorically, communism.

Key point

Orwell never writes from the viewpoint of the pigs or humans. They remain enigmatic, which in turn makes us empathise with the 'lower' animals.

The seasons

The fable is made more believable by references to the seasons – important in farming life. These also reinforce the plot. For example, Old Major delivers his speech in spring, a time of hope. Things go well during the summer; the attack on Snowball is in winter. The animals' lowest point is in Chapter 7, which begins, 'It was a bitter winter' (p. 54).

Key quote

"Still, it had been decided to build the walls three feet thick this time" *The ironic 'Still' implies that the pigs realise the humans are right (p. 54)*

Circularity

The story is told chronologically, but events overall are circular. In Chapter 2 it is the men who wield whips; in Chapter 10 it is the pigs. The pigs also now wear clothes. Gradually, all traces of equality give way to elitism. In Chapter 10 this is reinforced by Pilkington congratulating Napoleon: 'the lower animals on Animal Farm did more work and received less food than any animals in the county' (p. 100). Napoleon also reverts to the name 'The Manor Farm' (p. 102).

Style and language

Orwell writes in an unsophisticated third-person style, befitting a fable or fairy tale. It also matches his frequent portrayal of the animals' viewpoint. He uses almost no imagery. A rare example is the simple personification, 'Starvation seemed to stare them in the face' (p. 55).

Orwell avoids making explicit authorial judgements, often using the passive voice, as in 'it was noticed that these two were never in agreement' (p. 22). This creates a 'disingenuous' tone: he pretends to be naively innocent, like the animals. He also voices their thoughts: 'If they had no more food than they had had in Jones's day, at least they did not have less' (p. 46). At times, his tone is heavily ironic, for example: 'Out of spite, the human beings pretended not to believe that it was Snowball who had destroyed the windmill' (p. 54); or 'Snowball was secretly frequenting the farm by night!' (p. 57).

Activity 1

NARRATIVE IMPACT

Make a table to show the Seven Commandments, when each is broken, and how Commandments 4–7 are amended.

Activity 2

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

Write a paragraph analysing how Orwell portrays animals, pigs and men in the two paragraphs from 'That evening...' (pp. 98–99).

Exam practice

Sample questions

1. How does Orwell use the character of Squealer to explore ideas about persuasion and propaganda in *Animal Farm*?
   Write about:
   - how Orwell presents the character of Squealer;
   - how Orwell uses Squealer to present ideas about persuasion and propaganda.
2. How does Orwell present the theme of power in *Animal Farm*?
   Write about:
   - how Orwell presents powerful and less powerful characters;
   - how Orwell uses these characters to explore ideas about power.
3. 'When they had finished their confession, the dogs promptly tore their throats out, and in a terrible voice Napoleon demanded whether any other animal had anything to confess.'
   Explore the significance of violence in *Animal Farm*. You must refer to the context of the novel in your answer.

How to tackle Question 1

Start by underlining the key words in the question and considering what it is really asking you to do. Make sure you think about how Squealer relates to other animals, and how Orwell tells us about Squealer. Think about both 'persuasion *and* propaganda', which are closely related but not the same.

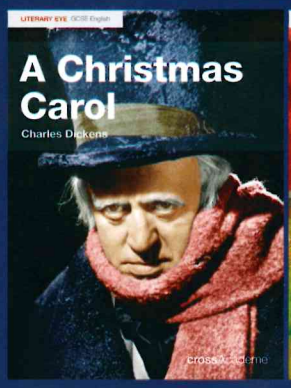
Consider the following questions:

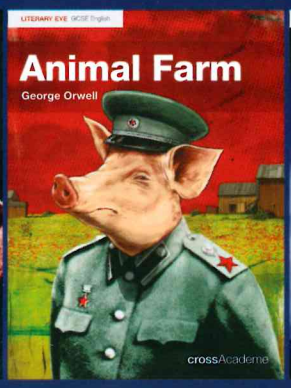
- How Orwell conveys ideas about Squealer – for example, are we told his thoughts?
- How does Squealer treat others animals, and how do they respond?
- How does Orwell describe Squealer?
- What does Squealer do and say?
- How does all this convey ideas about persuasion and propaganda?

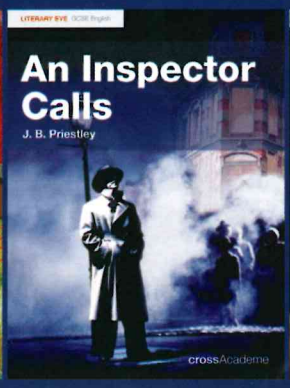
A possible plan

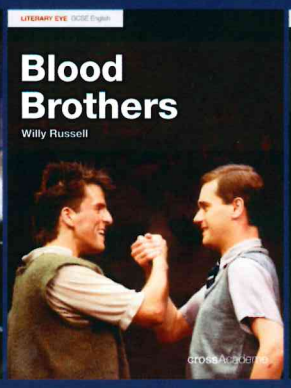
1. **Introduction:** Our first impressions: 'a small fat pig... very round cheeks, twinkling eyes, nimble movements, and a shrill voice' – sounds harmless, even appealing; talented – 'brilliant talker... very persuasive'. But 'he could turn black into white' suggests that he falsifies reality.
2. **How we learn about him:** Through his reputation (as above); his actions (e.g. he holds the paint-pot for Snowball, standing 'a few rungs below', showing his status and willingness to serve); and his persuasive speeches, where he twists the truth and tells outright lies. Orwell's language is revealing – e.g. when Boxer defends Snowball, Squealer gives him 'a very ugly look'. However, the story is never told from Squealer's viewpoint, and Orwell never comments on his thoughts – so, like the other pigs, he is mysterious, part of the remote elite.
3. **Types of lie:** Squealer tells half-truths – e.g. Snowball fled at the Battle of the Cowshed (he led men into an ambush), or that pigs need milk and apples (they may benefit, but mostly they just enjoy them); he also tells outright lies – e.g. cynical invention of Boxer's death-bed scene.
4. **Persuasion:** He plays on the animals' weaknesses and fears (e.g. he refers to science – relying on their ignorance); he uses statistics that they will not understand or be able to refute (refer to Stalin's use of statistics to mislead Russians and European leaders); and he threatens that Jones will come back.
5. **Propaganda:** He increasingly glorifies Napoleon – 'Our Leader' (compare with Hitler: *der Führer*); he quotes slogans – especially 'Four legs good, two legs better!'; and he uses the sheep (compare this with dictators' use of mobs).
6. **Conclusion:** Orwell uses Squealer to show how propaganda can fool the populace, especially if they want to believe.

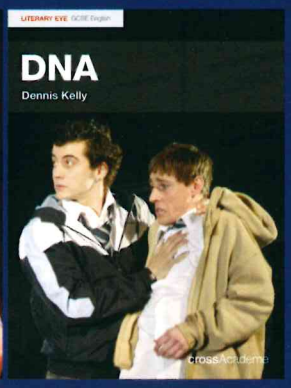
LITERARY EYE GCSE English

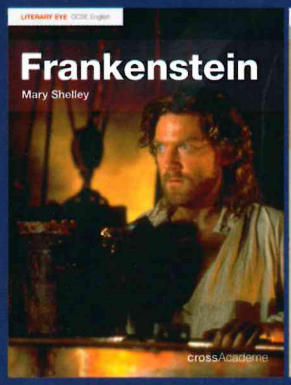


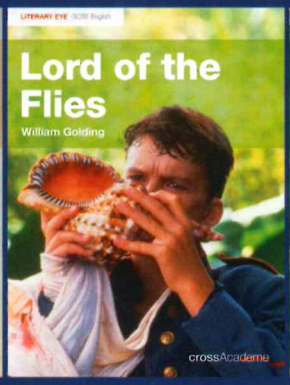


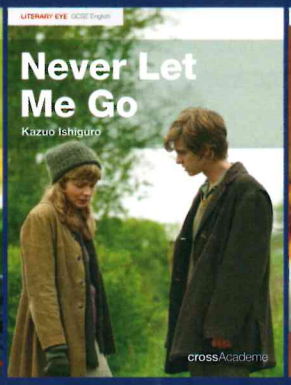


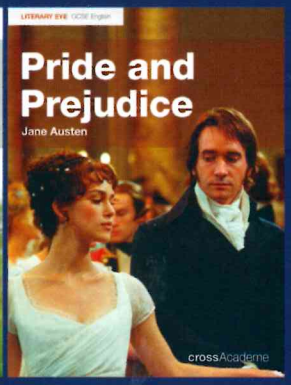


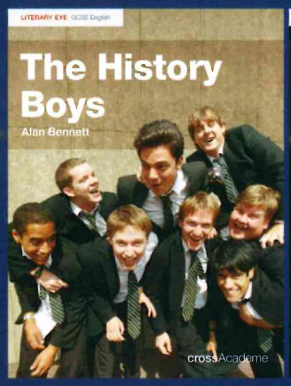


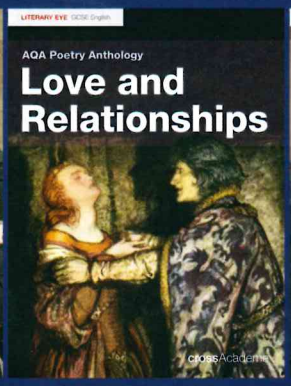


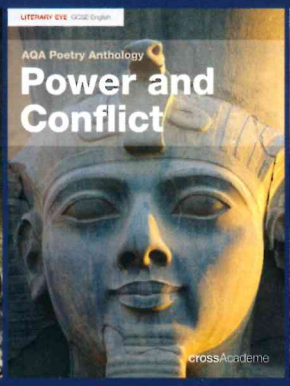


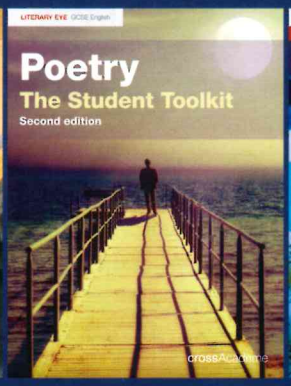


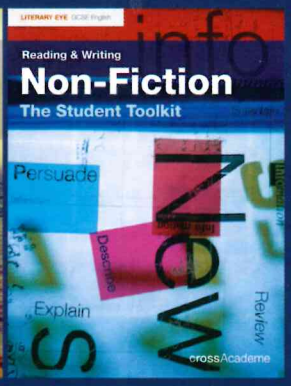


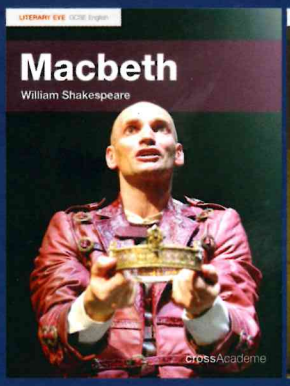


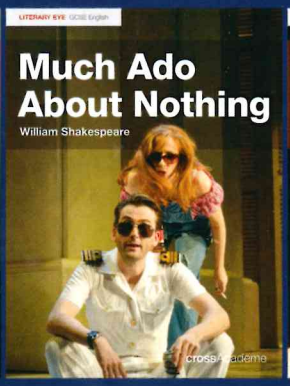


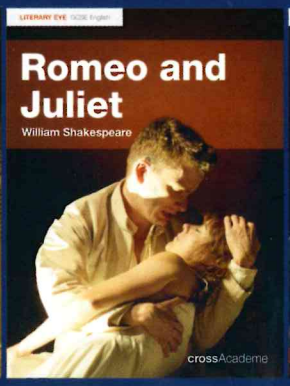


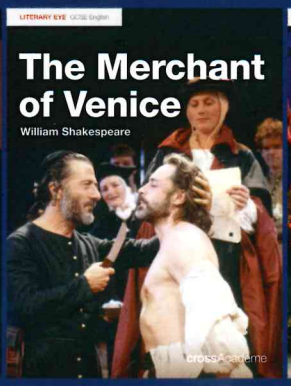


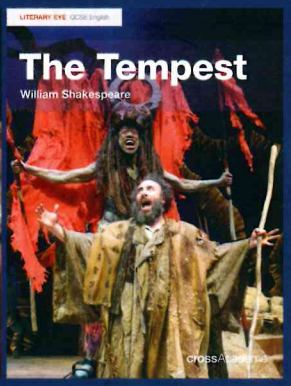












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Metre

Metre refers to the rhythmic structure of lines of verse. The majority of English verse since Chaucer is in**accentual-syllabic metre**, which consists of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables within a fixed total number of syllables in each line. The metrical rhythm is thus the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in each line. Groups of syllables are known as metrical **feet**; each line of verse is made up of a set number of feet. Thus:

Monometer: one foot per line
Dimeter: two feet per line
Trimeter: three feet per line
Tetrameter: four feet per line
Pentameter: five feet per line
Hexameter: six feet per line
Heptameter: seven feet per line
Octameter: eight feet per line

Each foot usually consists of a single stressed syllable—though there are some important variations—therefore these patterns correspond to the number of stressed syllables in a line; thus tetrameter has four, pentameter five, etc.

There are two types of metrical feet in English accentual-syllabic metre: **duple metre**, consisting of disyllabic (2-syllable) feet, in which stressed syllables (**x**) and unstressed syllables (**o**) alternate in pairs; and **triple metre**, consisting of trisyllabic (3-syllable) feet, in which single stressed syllables are grouped with a pair of unstressed syllables. Duple metre is the metre most commonly found in English verse.

The following metrical feet make up the most common rhythmical patterns:

Duple metre:

Iamb (iambic foot): **o x**
Trochee (trochaic foot): **x o**
Spondee (spondaic foot): **x x**
Pyrrhus / dibrach (pyrrhic foot): **o o**

Triple metre:

Dactyl (dactylic foot): **x o o**
Anapaest (anapaestic foot): **o o x**
Amphibrach: **o x o**
Molossus: **x x x**

Note that the spondee, pyrrhus and molossus do not usually form the basis for whole lines of verse, but are considered forms of **substitution**: that is, when a foot required by the metrical pattern being used is replaced by a different sort of foot. A frequently-found example of substitution is the replacement of the initial iamb in an iambic line by a trochee, e.g. (underlined syllables represent stressed syllables):

In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

—Shakespeare, Sonnet 73

(The first three lines of this quatrain are perfectly iambic; the initial foot of the fourth line is an example of trochaic substitution, also known as **inversion**.)

Other variations in metrical rhythm include **acephalexis**, in which the first syllable of a line that would be expected according to the regular metre of the line, is lacking; and **catalexis**, in which a line lacks the final syllable expected by its metrical pattern. A**masculine ending** is a line that ends on a stressed syllable, while a **feminine ending** is a line that ends on an unstressed syllable.

Free verse is poetry that does not conform to any regular metre.

Examples of different meters and metrical substitutions:

Iambic pentameter:

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

—Shakespeare, *Henry V*, IV.iii

An example of perfect iambic pentameter. Note the feminine ending in l.1 (in iambic metre a feminine ending adds an extra syllable to the line), and how the stresses follow the sense of the lines.

Trochaic tetrameter:

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

—Blake, “The Tyger”

The first two lines exhibit masculine endings, and thus are catalectic according to the regular pattern of trochaic metre; that is, they lack their final syllable. Arguably, the second foot in l.4 could be read as a spondaic substitution (if *dare* is stressed).

Spondaic substitution in iambic pentameter (l.3):

Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Em prison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

—Keats, “Ode on Melancholy”

Pyrrhic substitution in iambic tetrameter (l.2):

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

—Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”

Dactylic dimeter:

Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die

—Tennyson, “The Charge of the Light Brigade”

Anapaestic metre:

There was an Old Lady of Chertsey,
Who made a remarkable curtsey;
She twirled round and round,
Till she sunk underground,
Which distressed all the people of Chertsey.

—Edward Lear, “There Was an Old Lady of Chertsey”

As is common in limericks, this example includes multiple iambic substitutions, here in the initial syllables of lines 1-3.

Amphibrach:

And now comes an act of enormous enormance!
No former performer’s performed this performance!

—Dr. Seuss, *If I Ran the Circus*

Molossus:

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

—Tennyson, “Break, Break, Break”

The first line is an example of a molossus; it is also an example of epizeuxis (see below).

Stanzas

When a poem is divided into sections, each section is known as a stanza. Stanzas usually share the same structure as the other stanzas within the poem.

Tercet: a unit or stanza of three verse lines
Quatrain: a unit or stanza of four verse lines
Quintain: a stanza of five verse lines
Sestet: a unit or stanza of six verse lines
Septet or **heptastich**: a stanza of seven lines
Octave: a unit or stanza of eight verse lines
Decastich: a stanza or poem of ten lines

Note that many of these terms refer to a unit of this number of lines within a larger stanza or within a poem not divided into stanzas (e.g. a Shakespearean sonnet, which consists of three quatrains followed by a couplet).

Refrain: a line or lines regularly repeated throughout a poem, traditionally at the end of each stanza. Very often found in ballads; it was also used to great effect by Yeats (see for example ‘The Withering of the Boughs’ or ‘The Black Tower’). Usually nowadays printed in *italic* to distinguish it from the main body of the poem.

Enjambment: when the sense of a verse line runs over into the next line with no punctuated pause. The opposite is known as an **end-stopped** line. An example of enjambment in iambic pentameter:

A dungeon horrible, on all sides round

As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames

No light, but rather darkness visible

Served only to discover sights of woe

—Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I

Rhyme

End rhyme: rhyme occurring on stressed syllables at the ends of verse lines. The most common form of rhyme. Couplet: a pair of end-rhyming verse lines, usually of the same length. E.g.:

> Had we but World enough, and Time,
>
> This coyness Lady were no crime.
>
> We would sit down, and think which way
>
> To walk, and pass our long Loves Day.
>
> —Marvell, “To his Coy Mistress”

Internal rhyme: rhyme occurring within a single verse line.

Crossed rhyme: the rhyming of one word in the middle of a verse line with a word in the middle of the following line.

Half rhyme: also known as **slant rhyme**; an incomplete form of rhyme in which final consonants match but vowel sounds do not. E.g.:

> I have heard that hysterical women say
>
> They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow.
>
> Of poets that are always gay,
>
> For everybody knows or else should know
>
> That if nothing drastic is done
>
> Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out.
>
> Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
>
> Until the town lie beaten flat.

—Yeats, “Lapis Lazuli”

The first quatrain is an example of full end rhyme; the second quatrain an example of half rhyme.

Para-rhyme: a form of half rhymel; when all the consonants of the relevant words match, not just the final consonants. E.g.:

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall, –
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

—Wilfred Owen, “Strange Meeting”

Eye rhyme: a visual-only rhyme; i.e. when spellings match but in pronunciation there is no rhyme, e.g. want/pant, five/give.

Double rhyme: a rhyme on two syllables, the first stressed, the second unstressed. E.g.

I want a hero: —an uncommon want,

When every year and month sends forth a new one,

Till, after cloying the gazettes with can’t,

The age discovers he is not the true one

—Byron, *Don Juan*, I.i

The second and fourth lines are double rhymes; the first and third lines are examples of half rhyme/eye rhyme.

Assonance: the recurrence of similar vowel sounds in neighbouring words where the consonants do not match. E.g.:

> For the r**a**re and r**a**diant m**ai**den whom the **a**ngels n**a**me Lenore—
> N**a**meless here for evermore.
>
> —Poe, “The Raven”

Consonance: the recurrence of similar consonants in neighbouring words where the vowel sounds do not match. The most commonly found forms of consonance, other than half rhyme and para-rhyme, are alliteration and sibilance.

Alliteration: the repetition of initial consonants in a sequence of neighbouring words. E.g.:

> Hear the loud alarum bells—
>
> **B**razen **B**ells!
>
> What a **t**ale of **t**error, now, their **t**urbulency **t**ells!
>
> —Poe, “The Bells”

Sibilance: the repetition of sibilants, i.e. consonants producing a hissing sound. E.g.:

> Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing;
>
> Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness
>
> —Longfellow, *Tales of a Wayside Inn*

Blank verse: metrical verse that does not rhyme. Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is an example; the majority of Shakespeare is also in blank verse.

Figurative, rhetorical, and structural devices

Metaphor: when one thing is said to be another thing, or is described in terms normally connected to another thing, in order to suggest a quality shared by both. E.g.:

Love, fame, ambition, avarice—'tis the same,

Each idle, and all ill, and none the worst—

For all are meteors with a different name,

And Death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame.

—Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, IV

Simile: when one thing is directly compared with another thing; indicated by use of the words "as" or "like." E.g.:

I wandered lonely as a cloud

—Wordsworth, "Daffodils"

Metonymy: when something is referred to by an aspect or attribute of it, or by something associated with it. E.g.:

Now is the winter of our discontent

Made glorious summer by this son of York . . .

—Shakespeare, *Richard III*, I.i

Here "winter" and "summer" are examples of metaphor; "son of York" is an example of metonymy, being an attribute of Richard's brother, Edward IV, here the person being referred to.

Synecdoche: a form of metonymy in which something is referred to by a specific part of its whole. "All hands on deck" is an example, in which the crew are being referred to by one specific part—their hands. E.g.:

Take thy face hence.

—Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.iii

Personification or **prosopopoeia**: when inanimate objects, animals or ideas are referred to as if they were human. Similar terms are anthropomorphism, when human form is ascribed to something not human, e.g., a deity; and the pathetic fallacy, when natural phenomena are described as if they could feel as humans do. Shelley's 'Invocation to Misery' is an example.

Onomatopoeia: a word that imitates the sound to which it refers. E.g. "clang," "crackle," "bang," etc.

Synaesthesia: the application of terms relating to one sense to a different one, e.g., "a warm sound." For example:

> Odours there are . . . green as meadow grass
>
> —Baudelaire, "Correspondences"

Oxymoron: the combination of two contradictory terms. E.g.:

> Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,
>
> Still-waking sleep that is not what it is!
>
> —Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, I.i

Hendiadys: when a single idea is expressed by two nouns, used in conjunction. E.g. "house and home" or Hamlet's "Angels and ministers of grace" (*Hamlet*, I.iv).

Anaphora: the repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginnings of successive lines or clauses. E.g.:

> Is **this** the region, **this** the soil, the clime,
>
> Said then the lost archangel, **this** the seat
>
> That we must change for heaven . . .
>
> —Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I

Epistrophe: the repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive lines or clauses. E.g.:

> I know **thee**, I have found **thee**, & I will not let **thee** go
>
> —Blake, “America—a Prophecy”

Epizeuxis: the repetition of a word with no intervening words. E.g., Tennyson’s “Break, break, break,” quoted above.

Polysyndeton: use of more than the required amount of conjunctions. E.g.:

> Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain.
>
> —Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II

The opposite of asyndeton, which refers to the deliberate omission of conjunctions.

Anachronism: when an object, custom or idea is misplaced outside of its proper historical time. A famous example is the clock in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*.

Apostrophe: an address to an inanimate object, abstraction, or a dead or absent person. E.g.:

> Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,
>
> Why dost thou thus,
>
> Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?
>
> —Donne, “The Sunne Rising”

Hyperbole: extreme exaggeration, not intended literally. E.g.:

> Since Hero’s time hath half the world been black.
>
> —Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*

Adynaton: a form of hyperbole—a figure of speech that stresses the inexpressibility of something, usually by stating that words cannot describe it. H. P. Lovecraft's short story "The Unnamable" is essentially a riff on this figure of speech, satirizing Lovecraft's own regular use of it in his work.

Meiosis: an intentional understatement in which something is described as less significant than it really is. A well-known example is found in *Romeo and Juliet* when Mercutio describes his death-wound as 'a scratch' (III.iii).

Litotes: a form of meiosis; the affirmation of something by the denial of its opposite, e.g. "not uncommon," "not bad." Erotesis (rhetorical question): asking a question without requiring an answer, in order to assert or deny a statement. E.g.:

> What though the field be lost? All is not lost . . .
>
> —*Paradise Lost*, I

In medias res: the technique of beginning a narrative in the middle of the action, before relating preceding events at a later point. *Paradise Lost* is an example (following the convention of epic poetry).

Leitmotif: a phrase, image or situation frequently repeated throughout a work, supporting a central theme. An example is the personification of the mine shaft lift as a devouring creature in Zola's *Germinal*, repeated throughout the novel. Remember! Simply being able to identify the devices and knowing the terms is not enough. They are only a means to an end. You must always consider: why they are being used, what effect they have, and how they affect meaning(s).

Characterization is the process through which an author reveals a character's personality. It's a gentle unfolding of a woman's confidence or a man's brilliant mind.

We see this in plays, novels, TV shows, movies, poems, and any other format that involves the creation of a character. Examples of characterization come forth in a character's thoughts, words, deeds, appearance, and more.

Direct vs. Indirect Characterization

Writers reveal a character's personality through direct characterization, indirect characterization, or a combination of both. You'll see that, in direct characterization, the author comes right out with it and labels the character in a certain way. Indirect characterization is far subtler.

Direct Characterization Examples

With direct characterization, the author will tell you in precise words what the character is like. For example:

> The **confident** woman strode into the pub and took the **usually shy** Seamus by surprise. Despite his **generally reserved nature**, he got up the nerve to offer her his seat at the bar.

When we read this, we know right away that the female lead character can saunter into a room without a drop of fear. Likewise, we imagine the male lead is usually shy, keeping to himself. There's no guessing about their inherent natures.

Use these examples of direct characterization in literature to help you understand the concept even better:

> “Mr. Bingley was good-looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners.”
>
> *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

> “Everybody knew Bagheera, and nobody cared to cross his path, for he was as cunning as Tabaqui, as bold as the wild buffalo, and as reckless as the wounded elephant.”
>
> *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling

> “Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.”
>
> *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway

> “He had a long chin and big rather prominent teeth, just covered, when he was not talking, by his full, floridly curved lips. Old, young? Thirty? Fifty? Fifty-five? It was hard to say.”
>
> *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley

> “He was sunshine most always - I mean he made it seem like good weather.”
>
> *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

Indirect Characterization Examples

Indirect characterization is more subtle. It's not something we learn straight away in one, short passage. There are five ways a writer might reveal someone's character indirectly:

Actions - How does the character behave? Is he or she rash and spontaneous? Or, is he or she quiet, reserved, and slow to making any sort of change?

Effects - How is the character received by other characters? Do people gravitate toward him or her? Or, do they scatter to the wind when they know they're making their way toward them?

Looks - How is the character described? Is he or she well-polished, wearing the finest of frocks? Or, are they more free-spirited, taking on the mood of a hippie?

Speech - What type of dialogue is created for the character? Do they stutter and stammer in sheepish tones? Or, are they regal, commanding the attention of the room whenever they speak?

Thoughts - If an author is omniscient, or able to relay every character's thoughts, then we can learn a lot about the character through their thoughts. Do they go home and brood angrily by the fire? Do they worry and wonder through their days, hoping they haven't offended a soul and garnered everyone's affection?

Indirect characterization most often happens over the course of a longer work of fiction, rather than in a single paragraph or section. However, these shorter examples of indirect characterization in literature will help you see how this type of characterization works in practice:

> “Cathy was chewing a piece of meat, chewing with her front teeth. Samuel had never seen anyone chew that way before. And when she had swallowed, her little tongue flicked around her lips. Samuel’s mind repeated, ‘Something—something—can’t find what it is. Something wrong,’ and the silence hung on the table.”

> *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck

> "'First of all,' he said, 'if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from hispoint of view […] until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.'"
>
> *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

Characterization of Personality Types

As a literary device, characterization is perhaps one of the most powerful. Writers use similes, metaphors,personification , and more to build a story. But, what's a story without a lead character? As such, characterization is merely another color of paint on their palette. Just as important as the mood or theme, well-planned characterization will build a sturdy foundation for everything to come.

Examples of Characterization Based on Personality Traits

Let's look at a few examples of characterization. These detail a mere smattering of the multitude of ways in which a character can be described.

Characterizing a kind girl: She gently knelt down and stretched out her hand to help her friend return to her feet after she fell on the field.

Characterizing a rich man: He chortled heartily before deeply puffing on his Cuban cigar, briefly glancing at his Rolex. He announced his driver would arrive any moment, then tossed back the rest of his whiskey.

Characterizing a gruff man: "Look here," he said. "I'm not about to take guff from anyone. I've been around the block a few times, and I'm no one's doormat. I don't care who you are or where you're from. I don't want to hear what you have to say."

Characterizing someone anxious: She twisted her fingers in her hands and bit her lip. Her leg jiggled quickly, and her eyes darted from side to side.

Characterizing an embarrassed man: He dropped his eyes toward the floor, and his face burned crimson red. His shoulders hunched over, and he pursed his lips, clearly attempting to fight back tears.

Characterizing someone apologetic: Her eyes pleaded with him to understand what she was trying to say, her breath slow in frequency but intense with each inhale. Her quivering mouth revealed the shame she had for what she had done.

Characterizing someone stingy: Crinkling his brow and wrinkling his nose, Bill cringed when he saw the check for dinner. Clearly displeased with the cost of his eggs, bacon, doughnuts,

and coffee, he yanked open his wallet, tossed a dollar haphazardly on the table for tip, and went to the counter to pay for the meal.

Characterizing someone messy: She answered the door in a hurry, putting her earrings on while telling me to come in for a moment. I entered what looked like an abandoned war zone. Clothes and shoes were scattered across the floor. Dirty plates with hardened fettuccine noodles were piled on the table while magazines were spread haphazardly across the floor.

Characterizing someone thankful: She couldn't stop telling him how much she appreciated the small loan he was giving her. Hugs, cheek kisses, and an offer to make dinner ensued, with gratitude oozing from her every word and motion.

Characterizing someone inconsiderate: After he arrived 25 minutes late for the date, he proceeded to honk the horn from his car, forcing me to scamper across the ice-covered steps in my stilettos.

Characterizing someone skillful: He pulled the arrow back on the bow until it would go no further. When it left his hand, the arrow glided gracefully through the air and into the center of the target.

The Best Characters Have Depth

Certainly, these examples don't cover every type of character trait. The people we meet in our favorite books are often just as complex as the people we meet in our everyday lives. They're multi-faceted. Sometimes, they're kind and generous. Other times, they're jealous and petty.

If the author has created a strong character, we'll learn there are many layers, and they'll unfold with the greatest of intrigue. This is one of the most essential elements of great short stories and novels, and it’s what makes some books a joy to read.

Overview

The *GRE*® General Test measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking and analytical writing skills—skills that have been developed over a long period of time and are not related to a specific field of study, but are important for all. The test features question types that reflect the kind of thinking you will do and the skills you need to succeed in graduate and business school.

This publication provides an overview of each of the three measures of the test to help you get ready for test day. It is designed to help you:

- Understand what is being tested
- Gain familiarity with the question types
- Review test-taking strategies
- Become familiar with the calculator that will be distributed on test day
- Review scored Analytical Writing essay responses and reader commentary
- Understand scoring
- Practice taking the test

If you are planning to take the computer-delivered GRE General Test, visit **www.ets.org/gre/prepare** for test preparation materials for the computer-delivered test.

Test Structure

The paper-delivered GRE General Test contains two Analytical Writing sections, two Verbal Reasoning sections and two Quantitative Reasoning sections.

Total testing time is approximately 3 hours and 30 minutes. The directions at the beginning of each section specify the total number of questions in the section and the time allowed for the section. The Analytical Writing sections are always presented first.

Typical Paper-delivered GRE General Test

Measure	Number of Questions	Time
Analytical Writing (2 sections)	Section 1 Analyze an Issue Section 2 Analyze an Argument	30 minutes per section
Verbal Reasoning (2 sections)	25 questions per section	35 minutes per section
Quantitative Reasoning (2 sections)	25 questions per section	40 minutes per section

You will enter all responses for the Analytical Writing tasks and the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning questions in the test book itself. Also, you are allowed to use a basic hand-held calculator on the Quantitative Reasoning sections. The calculator will be provided to you at the test site; you may not use your own calculator. Information about using the calculator to help you answer questions appears on page 31.

Preparing for the GRE General Test

Before taking the practice General Test, it is important to become familiar with the content of each of the measures. In this publication, you will find information specific to each measure of the test. You can use this information to understand the type of material on which you will be tested and the question types within each measure. Determine which strategies work best for you. Remember—you can do very well on the test without answering every question in each section correctly.

Test-taking Strategies

Analytical Writing Measure

Everyone—even the most practiced and confident of writers—should spend some time preparing for the Analytical Writing measure before arriving at the test center. It is important to understand the skills measured and how the tasks are scored. It is also useful to review the scoring guides, sample topics, scored sample essay responses and reader commentary for each task.

The tasks in the Analytical Writing measure relate to a broad range of subjects—from the fine arts and humanities to the social and physical sciences—but no task requires specific content knowledge. In fact, each task has been tested by actual GRE test

takers to ensure that it possesses several important characteristics, including the following:

- GRE test takers, regardless of their field of study or special interests, understood the task and could easily respond to it.
- The task elicited the kinds of complex thinking and persuasive writing that university faculty consider important for success in graduate school.
- The responses were varied in content and in the way the writers developed their ideas.

To help you prepare for the Analytical Writing measure, the GRE Program has published the entire pool of tasks from which your test tasks will be selected. You might find it helpful to review the Issue and Argument pools. You can view the published pools at **www.ets.org/gre/awtopics**.

Before taking the Analytical Writing measure, review the strategies, sample topics, essay responses and reader commentary for each task contained in this document. Also review the scoring guides for each task. This will give you a deeper understanding of how readers evaluate essays and the elements they are looking for in an essay.

In the paper-delivered General Test, the topics in the Analytical Writing measure will be presented in the test book, and you will handwrite your essay responses in the test book in the space provided.

It is important to budget your time. Within the 30-minute time limit for the Issue task, you will need to allow sufficient time to consider the issue and the specific instructions, plan a response and compose your essay. Within the 30-minute time limit for the Argument task, you will need to allow sufficient time to consider the argument and the specific instructions, plan a response and compose your essay. Although the GRE readers who score your essays understand the time constraints under which you write and will consider your response a first draft, you still want it to be the best possible example of your writing that you can produce under the testing conditions.

Save a few minutes at the end of each section to check for obvious errors. Although an occasional spelling or grammatical error will not affect your score, severe and persistent errors will detract from the overall effectiveness of your writing and lower your score accordingly.

Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning Measures

The questions in the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning measures have a variety of formats. Some require you to select a single answer choice; others require you to select one or more answer choices, and yet others require you to enter a numeric answer. Make sure when answering a question that you understand what response is required. Complete instructions for answering each question type are included in the practice test after the two Analytical Writing tasks.

When taking a Verbal Reasoning or Quantitative Reasoning section, you are free, within that section, to skip questions that you might have difficulty answering and come back to them later during the time provided to work on that section. Also, during that time, you may change the answer to any question in that section by erasing it completely and filling in an alternative answer. Be careful not to leave any stray marks in the answer area, as they may be interpreted as incorrect responses. You can, however, safely make notes or perform calculations on other parts of the page. No additional scratch paper will be provided.

Your Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores will be determined by the number of questions for which you select or provide the best answer. Questions for which you mark no answer or more or fewer than the requested number of answers are not counted in scoring. Nothing is subtracted from a score if you answer a question incorrectly. Therefore, to maximize your scores on the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning measures of the paper-delivered test, it is best to answer every question.

Work as rapidly as you can without being careless. Since no question carries greater weight than any other, do not waste time pondering individual questions you find extremely difficult or unfamiliar. You may want to go through a section rapidly at first, stopping only to answer those questions you can do so with certainty. Then go back and answer the questions that require greater thought, concluding with the difficult questions if you have time.
Note: During the actual administration of the General Test, you may work only on the section the test center supervisor designates and only for the time allowed. You may not go back to an earlier section of the test after the supervisor announces, "Please stop

work" for that section. The supervisor is authorized to dismiss you from the center for doing so. All answers must be recorded in the test book.

Breaks

There is a 10-minute break following the second Analytical Writing section.

Scoring and Score Reporting

Analytical Writing Measure

For the Analytical Writing measure, each essay receives a score from two readers using a six-point holistic scale. In holistic scoring, readers are trained to assign scores based on the overall quality of an essay in response to the assigned task. If the two scores differ by more than one point on the scale, the discrepancy is adjudicated by a third GRE reader. Otherwise, the two scores on each essay are averaged.

The final score on the two essays are then averaged and rounded to the nearest half-point interval on the 0-6 score scale. A single score is reported for the Analytical Writing measure.

The primary emphasis in scoring the Analytical Writing measure is on your critical thinking and analytical writing skills. Scoring guides for the Issue and Argument prompts are included in this publication in Appendix A on pages 91–94 and available at **www.ets.org/gre/scoreguides**.

Independent Intellectual Activity

During the scoring process for the GRE General Test, essay responses on the Analytical Writing measure are reviewed by ETS essay-similarity-detection software and by experienced essay readers. In light of the high value placed on independent intellectual activity within graduate schools and universities, ETS reserves the right to cancel test scores of any test taker when an essay response includes any of the following:

- Text that is unusually similar to that found in one or more other GRE essay responses
- Quoting or paraphrasing, without attribution, language that appears in published or unpublished sources, including sources from the Internet and/or sources provided by any third party.
- Unacknowledged use of work that has been produced through collaboration with others without citation of the contribution of others
- Essays submitted as work of the test taker that appear to have been borrowed in whole or in part from elsewhere or prepared by another person

When one or more of the above circumstances occurs, ETS may conclude, in its professional judgment, that the essay response does not reflect the independent writing skills that this test seeks to measure. When ETS reaches that conclusion, it cancels the Analytical Writing score, and because Analytical Writing scores are an integral part of the GRE General Test scores, those scores are canceled as well.

Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning Measures

Scoring of the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning measures is essentially a two-step process. First a raw score is computed for each measure. The raw score for each measure is the number of questions answered correctly.

The Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning raw scores are then converted to scaled scores through a process known as equating. The equating process accounts for minor variations in difficulty among the different test editions. Thus, a given scaled score for a particular measure reflects the same level of performance regardless of which edition of the test that was taken.

Score Reporting

The scores for the GRE General Test include:

- A Verbal Reasoning score reported on a 130–170 score scale, in one-point increments
- A Quantitative Reasoning score reported on a 130–170 score scale, in one-point increments
- An Analytical Writing score reported on a 0–6 score scale, in half-point increments

If no questions are answered for a specific measure (e.g., Verbal Reasoning), then you will receive a No Score (NS) for that measure.

Descriptions of the analytical writing abilities characteristic of particular score levels are available in Appendix A on page 95.

Score-Reporting Timeframes

Scores on the paper-delivered GRE General Test are reported approximately five weeks after the test date. For specific information on score reporting dates for paper-delivered administrations, visit **www.ets.org/gre/score/dates**.

For tests taken on or after July 1, 2016, scores are reportable for five years following your test date. For tests taken prior to July 1, 2016, scores are reportable for five years following the testing year in which you tested. For more information about GRE score reporting, visit **www.ets.org/gre/scores/get**.

Introduction to the Analytical Writing Measure

The Analytical Writing measure tests your critical thinking and analytical writing skills. It assesses your ability to articulate and support complex ideas, construct and evaluate arguments, and sustain a focused and coherent discussion. It does not assess specific content knowledge.

The Analytical Writing measure consists of two separately timed analytical writing tasks:

- A 30-minute "Analyze an Issue" task
- A 30-minute "Analyze an Argument" task

The Issue task presents an opinion on an issue of general interest followed by specific instructions on how to respond to that issue. You are required to evaluate the issue, consider its complexities and develop an argument with reasons and examples to support your views.

The Argument task requires you to evaluate a given argument according to specific instructions. You will need to consider the logical soundness of the argument rather than agree or disagree with the position it presents.

The two tasks are complementary in that one requires you to construct your own argument by taking a position and providing evidence supporting your views on an issue, and the other requires you to evaluate someone else's argument by assessing its claims and evaluating the evidence it provides.

Analyze an Issue Task

The Analyze an Issue task assesses your ability to think critically about a topic of general interest and to clearly express your thoughts about it in writing. Each Issue topic makes a claim that test takers can discuss from various perspectives and apply to many different situations or conditions. Your task is to present a compelling case for your own position on the issue. Before beginning your written response, be sure to read the issue and the instructions that follow the Issue statement. Think about the issue from several points of view, considering the complexity of ideas associated with those views. Then, make notes about the position you want to develop and list the main reasons and examples you could use to support that position.

It is important that you address the central issue according to the specific instructions. Each Issue Topic is accompanied by one of the following sets of instructions:

- Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true and explain how these considerations shape your position.
- Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the recommendation and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, describe specific circumstances in which adopting the recommendation would or would not be advantageous and explain how these examples shape your position.
- Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim. In developing and supporting your position, be sure to address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position.
- Write a response in which you discuss which view more closely aligns with your own position and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should address both of the views presented.
- Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim and the reason on which that claim is based.
- Write a response in which you discuss your views on the policy and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider the possible consequences of implementing the policy and explain how these consequences shape your position.

The GRE readers scoring your response are not looking for a "right" answer—in fact, as far as they are concerned, there is no correct position to take. Instead, the readers are evaluating the skill with which you address the specific instructions and articulate and develop an argument to support your evaluation of the issue.

Understanding the Context for Writing: Purpose and Audience

The Analyze an Issue task is an exercise in critical thinking and persuasive writing. The purpose of this task is to determine how well you can develop a compelling argument supporting your own evaluation of an issue and then effectively communicate that argument in writing to an academic audience. Your audience consists of GRE readers who are carefully trained to apply the scoring criteria identified in the scoring guide for the Analyze an Issue task in Appendix A on pages 91–92.

To get a clearer idea of how GRE readers apply the Issue scoring criteria to actual responses, you should review scored sample Issue essay responses and reader commentary. The sample responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, will show you a variety of successful strategies for organizing, developing and communicating a persuasive argument. The reader commentary discusses specific aspects of evaluation and writing, such as the use of examples, development and support, organization, language fluency and word choice. For each response, the commentary points out aspects that are particularly persuasive as well as any that detract from the overall effectiveness of the essay.

Preparing for the Issue Task

Since the Issue task is meant to assess the persuasive writing skills you have developed throughout your education, it has been designed neither to require any particular course of study nor to advantage students with a particular type of training.

Many college textbooks on composition offer advice on persuasive writing and argumentation that you might find useful, but even this advice might be more technical and specialized than you need for the Issue task. You will not be expected to know specific critical thinking or writing terms or strategies; instead, you should be able to respond to the specific instructions and use reasons, evidence and examples to support your position on an issue.

Suppose, for instance, that an Issue topic asks you to consider a policy that would require government financial support for art museums and the implications of implementing the policy. If your position is that government should fund art museums, you might support your position by discussing the reasons art is important and explain that government funding would make access to museums available to everyone. On the other hand, if your position is that government should not support museums, you might point out that art museums are not as deserving of limited governmental funding as are other, more socially important institutions, which would suffer if the policy were implemented. Or, if you are in favor of government funding for art museums only under certain conditions, you might focus on the artistic criteria, cultural concerns or political conditions that you think should determine how, or whether, art museums receive government funds. It is not your position that matters as much as the critical thinking skills you display in developing your position.

An excellent way to prepare for the Issue task is to practice writing on some of the published topics. There is no "best" approach: some people prefer to start practicing without regard to the 30-minute time limit; others prefer to take a "timed test" first and practice within the time limit. Regardless of which approach you take, you should first review the task directions and then follow these steps:

- Carefully read the claim and the specific instructions and make sure you understand them; if they seem unclear, discuss them with a friend or teacher.
- Think about the claim and instructions in relation to your own ideas and experiences, to events you have read about or observed and to people you have known; this is the knowledge base from which you will develop compelling reasons and examples in your argument that reinforce, negate or qualify the claim in some way.
- Decide what position on the issue you want to take and defend.
- Decide what compelling evidence (reasons and examples) you can use to support your position.

Remember that this is a task in critical thinking and persuasive writing. The most successful responses will explore the complexity of the claim and follow the specific task instructions. As you prepare for the

Issue task, you might find it helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- What precisely is the central issue?
- What precisely are the instructions asking me to do?
- Do I agree with all or any part of the claim? Why or why not?
- Does the claim make certain assumptions? If so, are they reasonable?
- Is the claim valid only under certain conditions? If so, what are they?
- Do I need to explain how I interpret certain terms or concepts used in the claim?
- If I take a certain position on the issue, what reasons support my position?
- What examples—either real or hypothetical —could I use to illustrate those reasons and advance my point of view? Which examples are most compelling?

Once you have decided on a position to defend, consider the perspectives of others who might not agree with your position. Ask yourself:

- What reasons might someone use to refute or undermine my position?
- How should I acknowledge or defend against those views in my essay?

To plan your response, you might want to summarize your position and make notes about how you will support it. When you've done this, look over your notes and decide how you will organize your response. Then write a response developing your position on the issue. Even if you don't write a full response, you should find it helpful to practice with a few of the Issue topics and to sketch out your possible responses.

After you have practiced with some of the topics, try writing responses to some of them within the 30-minute time limit so that you have a good idea of how to use your time in the actual test.

It would probably be helpful to get some feedback on your response from an instructor who teaches critical thinking or writing or to trade essays on the same topic with other students and discuss one another's responses in relation to the scoring guide. Try to determine how each essay meets or misses the criteria for each score point in the guide. Comparing your own response to the scoring guide will help you see how and where to improve.

The Form of Your Response

You are free to organize and develop your response in any way you think will enable you to effectively communicate your ideas about the issue. Your response may incorporate particular writing strategies learned in English composition or writing-intensive college courses. GRE readers will not be looking for a particular developmental strategy or mode of writing; in fact, when GRE readers are trained, they review hundreds of Issue responses that, although highly diverse in content and form, display similar levels of critical thinking and persuasive writing.

Readers will see some Issue responses at the 6 score level that begin by briefly summarizing the writer's position on the issue and then explicitly announcing the main points to be argued. They will see others that lead into the writer's position by making a prediction, asking a series of questions, describing a scenario or defining critical terms in the quotation. The readers know that a writer can earn a high score by giving multiple examples or by presenting a single, extended example. Look at the sample Issue responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, to see how other writers have successfully developed and organized their arguments.

You should use as many or as few paragraphs as you consider appropriate for your argument; e.g., you will probably need to create a new paragraph whenever your discussion shifts to a new cluster of ideas. What matters is not the number of examples, the number of paragraphs or the form your argument takes, but the cogency of your ideas about the issue and the clarity and skill with which you communicate those ideas to academic readers.

Sample Issue Task

Following is a sample Issue task of the sort that you might see on the test:

> As people rely more and more on technology to solve problems, the ability of humans to think for themselves will surely deteriorate.
>
> Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true and explain how these considerations shape your position.

Strategies for This Topic

In this task, you are asked to discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Thus, responses may range from strong agreement or strong disagreement to qualified agreement or qualified disagreement. You are also instructed to explain your reasoning and consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true. A successful response need not comment on all or any one of the points listed below and may well discuss other reasons or examples not mentioned here in support of the position taken.

Although this topic is accessible to respondents of all levels of ability, for your response to receive a top score, it is particularly important that you remain focused on the task and provide clearly relevant examples and/or reasons to support the point of view you are expressing. Lower level responses may be long and full of examples of modern technology, but those examples may not be clearly related to a particular position. For example, a respondent who strongly disagrees with the statement may choose to use computer technology as proof that thinking ability is not deteriorating. However, the mere existence of computer technology does not adequately prove this point; e.g., perhaps the ease of computer use inhibits our thinking ability. To receive a higher level score, the respondent should explain in what ways computer technology may call for or require thinking ability.

This topic could elicit a wide variety of approaches, especially considering the different possible interpretations of the phrase "the ability of humans to think for themselves." Although most respondents may take it to mean problem solving, others could interpret it as emotional and social intelligence; i.e., the ability to communicate/connect with others. With any approach, it is possible to discuss examples such as calculators, word processing tools such as spell/grammar check, tax preparation software, Internet research and a variety of other common household and business technologies.

You may agree with the topic and argue that:

- Reliance on technology leads to dependency; we come to rely on problem-solving technologies to such a degree that when they fail we are in worse shape than if we didn't have them
- Everyday technologies such as calculators and cash registers have decreased our ability to perform simple calculations, a "use it or lose it" approach to thinking ability

Or you may take issue with the topic and argue that technology facilitates and improves our thinking skills, arguing that:

- Developing, implementing and using technology requires problem solving
- Technology frees us from mundane problem solving (e.g., calculations) and allows us to engage in more complex thinking
- Technology provides access to information otherwise unavailable
- Technology connects people at a distance and allows them to share ideas
- Technology is dependent on the human ability to think and make choices (every implementation of and advance in technology is driven by human intelligence and decision making)

On the other hand, you could decide to explore the middle ground in the debate and point out that while technology may diminish some mental skill sets, it enables other (perhaps more important) types of thinking to thrive. Such a response might distinguish between complex problem solving and simple "data maintenance" (i.e., performing calculations and organizing information).

Other approaches could involve taking a historical, philosophical or sociological stance, or, with equal effectiveness, using personal experience to illustrate a position. One could argue that the value or detriment of relying on technology is determined by the individual (or society) using it or that only those who develop technology (i.e., technical specialists) are maintaining their problem-solving skills, while the rest of us are losing them.

Again, it is important for you to avoid overly general examples or lists of examples without expansion. It is also essential to do more than paraphrase the prompt. Keep in mind that what counts is the ability to clearly express a particular point of view in relation to the issue and specific task instructions and to support that position with relevant reasons and/or examples.

To view scored sample essay responses and reader commentary for this sample topic, see Appendix B on pages 96–104.

Analyze an Argument Task

The Analyze an Argument task assesses your ability to understand, analyze and evaluate arguments according to specific instructions and to convey your evaluation clearly in your writing. The task consists

of a brief passage in which the author makes a case for some course of action or interpretation of events by presenting claims backed by reasons and evidence.

Your task is to discuss the logical soundness of the author's case by critically examining the line of reasoning and the use of evidence. This task requires you to read the argument and instructions carefully. You might want to read the argument more than once and make brief notes about points you want to develop more fully in your response. In reading the argument, you should pay special attention to:

- What is offered as evidence, support or proof
- What is explicitly stated, claimed or concluded
- What is assumed or supposed, perhaps without justification or proof
- What is not stated, but necessarily follows from what is stated

In addition, you should consider the *structure* of the argument—the way in which these elements are linked together to form a *line of reasoning*; i.e., you should recognize the separate, sometimes implicit steps in the thinking process and consider whether the movement from each step to the next is logically sound. In tracing this line, look for transition words and phrases that suggest the author is attempting to make a logical connection (e.g., *however, thus, therefore, evidently, hence, in conclusion*).

An important part of performing well on the Argument task is remembering what you are not being asked to do:

- You are not being asked to discuss whether the statements in the argument are true or accurate.
- You are not being asked to agree or disagree with the position stated.
- You are not being asked to express your own views on the subject being discussed (as you were in the Issue task).

Instead, you are being asked to evaluate the logical soundness of an argument of another writer and, in doing so, to demonstrate the critical thinking, perceptive reading and analytical writing skills that university faculty consider important for success in graduate school.

It is important that you address the argument according to the specific instructions. Each task is accompanied by one of the following sets of instructions:

- Write a response in which you discuss what specific evidence is needed to evaluate the argument and explain how the evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.
- Write a response in which you examine the stated and/or unstated assumptions of the argument. Be sure to explain how the argument depends on these assumptions, and what the implications are for the argument if the assumptions prove unwarranted.
- Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be answered in order to decide whether the recommendation and the argument on which it is based are reasonable. Be sure to explain how the answers to these questions would help to evaluate the recommendation.
- Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be answered in order to decide whether the advice and the argument on which it is based are reasonable. Be sure to explain how the answers to these questions would help to evaluate the advice.
- Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be answered in order to decide whether the recommendation is likely to have the predicted result. Be sure to explain how the answers to these questions would help to evaluate the recommendation.
- Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be answered in order to decide whether the prediction and the argument on which it is based are reasonable. Be sure to explain how the answers to these questions would help to evaluate the prediction.
- Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be addressed in order to decide whether the conclusion and the argument on which it is based are reasonable. Be sure to explain how the answers to the questions would help to evaluate the conclusion.
- Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

Analyze an Argument is a critical thinking task requiring a written response. Consequently, the analytical skills displayed in your evaluation carry great weight in determining your score; however, the clarity with which you convey ideas is also important to your overall score.

Understanding the Context for Writing: Purpose and Audience

The purpose of the task is to see how well equipped you are to insightfully evaluate an argument written by someone else and to effectively communicate your evaluation in writing to an academic audience. Your audience consists of GRE readers carefully trained to apply the scoring criteria identified in the scoring guide for the Analyze an Argument task on pages 93–94.

To get a clearer idea of how GRE readers apply the Argument scoring criteria to actual essays, you should review scored sample Argument essay responses and reader commentary. The sample responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, will show you a variety of successful strategies for organizing and developing an insightful evaluation. The reader commentary discusses specific aspects of analytical writing, such as cogency of ideas, development and support, organization, syntactic variety and facility with language. For each response, the commentary points out aspects that are particularly effective and insightful as well as any that detract from the overall effectiveness of the essay.

Preparing for the Argument Task

Since the Argument task is meant to assess analytical writing and informal reasoning skills that you have developed throughout your education, it has been designed neither to require any specific course of study nor to advantage students with a particular type of training.

Many college textbooks on rhetoric and composition have sections on informal logic and critical thinking that might prove helpful, but even these might be more detailed and technical than the task requires. You will not be expected to know specific methods of analysis or technical terms.

For instance, in one topic an elementary school principal might conclude that new playground equipment has improved student attendance because absentee rates have declined since it was installed. You will not need to see that the principal has committed the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy; you will simply need to see that there are other possible explanations for the improved attendance, to offer some common-sense examples and to suggest what would be necessary to verify the conclusion. For instance, absentee rates might have decreased because the climate was mild. This would have to be ruled out in order for the principal's conclusion to be valid.

Although you do not need to know special analytical techniques and terminology, you should be familiar with the directions for the Argument task and with certain key concepts, including the following:

- Alternative explanation—a competing version of what might have caused the events in question that undercuts or qualifies the original explanation because it, too, can account for the observed facts
- Analysis—the process of breaking something (e.g., an argument) down into its component parts in order to understand how they work together to make up the whole
- Argument—a claim or a set of claims with reasons and evidence offered as support; a line of reasoning meant to demonstrate the truth or falsehood of something
- Assumption—a belief, often unstated or unexamined, that someone must hold in order to maintain a particular position; something that is taken for granted but that must be true in order for the *conclusion* to be true
- Conclusion—the end point reached by a line of reasoning, valid if the reasoning is sound; the resulting assertion
- Counterexample—an example, real or hypothetical, that refutes or disproves a statement in the *argument*
- Evaluation—an assessment of the quality of evidence and reasons in an argument and of the overall merit of an *argument*

An excellent way to prepare for the Analyze an Argument task is to practice writing on some of the published Argument topics. There is no one way to practice that is best for everyone. Some prefer to start practicing without adhering to the 30-minute time limit. If you follow this approach, take all the time you need to evaluate the argument. Regardless of the approach you take, consider the following steps:

- Carefully read the argument and the specific instructions—you might want to read them more than once.
- Identify as many of the argument's claims, conclusions and underlying assumptions as possible and evaluate their quality.
- Think of as many alternative explanations and counterexamples as you can.

- Think of what specific additional evidence might weaken or lend support to the claims.
- Ask yourself what changes in the argument would make the reasoning more sound.

Write down each of these thoughts. When you've gone as far as you can with your evaluation, look over the notes and put them in a good order for discussion (perhaps by numbering them). Then write an evaluation according to the specific instructions by fully developing each point that is relevant to those instructions. Even if you choose not to write a full essay response, you should find it helpful to practice evaluating a few of the arguments and sketching out your responses.

When you become quicker and more confident, you should practice writing some Argument responses within the 30-minute time limit so that you will have a good sense of how to pace yourself in the actual test. For example, you will not want to discuss one point so exhaustively or to provide so many equivalent examples that you run out of time to make your other main points.

You might want to get feedback on your response(s) from a writing instructor, philosophy teacher or someone who emphasizes critical thinking in his or her course. It can also be informative to trade papers on the same topic with fellow students and discuss each other's responses in terms of the scoring guide. Focus not so much on the "right scores" as on seeing how the responses meet or miss the performance standards for each score point and what you need to do to improve.

How to Interpret Numbers, Percentages and Statistics in Argument Topics

Some arguments contain numbers, percentages or statistics that are offered as evidence in support of the argument's conclusion. For example, an argument might claim that a certain community event is less popular this year than it was last year because only 100 people attended this year in comparison with 150 last year, a 33 percent decline in attendance.

It is important to remember that you are not being asked to do a mathematical task with the numbers, percentages or statistics. Instead you should evaluate these as evidence intended to support the conclusion. In the example above, the conclusion is that a community event has become less popular. You should ask yourself, "Does the difference between 100 people and 150 people support that conclusion?" In this case, there are other possible explanations; e.g., the weather might have been much worse this year, this year's event might have been held at an inconvenient time, the cost of the event might have gone up this year or there might have been another popular event this year at the same time.

Any one of these could explain the difference in attendance and weaken the conclusion that the event was "less popular." Similarly, percentages might support or weaken a conclusion depending on what actual numbers the percentages represent. Consider the claim that the drama club at a school deserves more funding because its membership has increased by 100 percent. This 100 percent increase could be significant if there had been 100 members and now there are 200 members, whereas the increase would be much less significant if there had been five members and now there are 10.

Remember that any numbers, percentages or statistics in Argument tasks are used only as evidence in support of a conclusion, and you should always consider whether they actually support the conclusion.

The Form of Your Response

You are free to organize and develop your response in any way you think will effectively communicate your evaluation of the argument. Your response may, but need not, incorporate particular writing strategies learned in English composition or writing-intensive college courses. GRE readers will not be looking for a particular developmental strategy or mode of writing. In fact, when GRE readers are trained, they review hundreds of Argument responses that, although highly diverse in content and form, display similar levels of critical thinking and analytical writing.

For example, readers will see some essays at the 6 score level that begin by briefly summarizing the argument and then explicitly stating and developing the main points of the evaluation. The readers know that a writer can earn a high score by developing several points in an evaluation or by identifying a central feature in the argument and developing that evaluation extensively. You might want to look at the sample Argument responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, to see how other writers have successfully developed and organized their responses.

You should make choices about format and organization that you think support and enhance the overall effectiveness of your evaluation. This means using as many or as few paragraphs as you

consider appropriate for your response; e.g., create a new paragraph when your discussion shifts to a new point of evaluation. You might want to organize your evaluation around the structure of the argument itself, discussing it line by line. Or you might want to first point out a central questionable assumption and then move on to discuss related weaknesses in the argument's line of reasoning.

Similarly, you might want to use examples to help illustrate an important point in your evaluation or move your discussion forward. However, remember that it is your critical thinking and analytical writing that are being assessed, not your ability to come up with examples. What matters is not the form your response takes, but how insightfully you evaluate the argument and how articulately you communicate your evaluation to academic readers within the context of the task.

Sample Argument Task

Following is a sample Argument task that you might see on the test:

> In surveys Mason City residents rank water sports (swimming, boating and fishing) among their favorite recreational activities. The Mason River flowing through the city is rarely used for these pursuits, however, and the city park department devotes little of its budget to maintaining riverside recreational facilities. For years there have been complaints from residents about the quality of the river's water and the river's smell. In response, the state has recently announced plans to clean up Mason River. Use of the river for water sports is therefore sure to increase. The city government should for that reason devote more money in this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities.
>
> Write a response in which you examine the stated and/or unstated assumptions of the argument. Be sure to explain how the argument depends on these assumptions and what the implications are if the assumptions prove unwarranted.

Strategies for This Topic

This argument cites a survey to support the prediction that the use of the Mason River is sure to increase and thus recommends that the city government should devote more money in this year's budget to the riverside recreational facilities.

In developing your evaluation, you are asked to examine the argument's stated and/or unstated assumptions and discuss what the implications are if the assumptions prove unwarranted. A successful response must discuss both the argument's assumptions AND the implications of these assumptions for the argument. A response that does not address both parts of the task is unlikely to receive an upper-half score.

Though responses may well raise other points, some assumptions of the argument, and some ways in which the argument depends on those assumptions, include:

- The assumption that people who rank water sports "among their favorite recreational activities" are actually likely to participate in them. (It is possible that they just like to watch them.) This assumption underlies the claim that use of the river for water sports is sure to increase after the state cleans up the Mason River and that the city should for that reason devote more money to riverside recreational facilities.
- The assumption that what residents say in surveys can be taken at face value. (It is possible that survey results exaggerate the interest in water sports.) This assumption underlies the claim that use of the river for water sports is sure to increase after the state cleans up the Mason River and that the city should for that reason devote more money to riverside recreational facilities.
- The assumption that Mason City residents would actually want to do water sports in the Mason River. (As recreational activities, it is possible that water sports are regarded as pursuits for vacations and weekends away from the city.) This assumption underlies the claim that use of the river for water sports is sure to increase after the state cleans up the Mason River and that the city should for that reason devote more money to riverside recreational facilities.
- The assumption that the park department's devoting little of its budget to maintaining riverside recreational facilities means that these facilities are inadequately maintained. This assumption underlies the claim that the city should devote more money in this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities. If current facilities are adequately maintained, then increased funding might not be needed even if recreational use of the river does increase.
- The assumption that the riverside recreational facilities are facilities designed for people who participate in water sports and not some

other recreational pursuit. This assumption underlies the claim that the city should devote more money in this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities.

- The assumption that the dirtiness of the river is the cause of its being little used and that cleaning up the river will be sufficient to increase recreational use of the river. (Residents might have complained about the water quality and smell even if they had no desire to boat, swim or fish in the river.) This assumption underlies the claim that the state's plan to clean up the river will result in increased use of the river for water sports.
- The assumption that the complaints about the river are numerous and significant. This assumption motivates the state's plan to clean up the river and underlies the claim that use of the river for water sports is sure to increase. (Perhaps the complaints are coming from a very small minority, in which case cleaning the river might be a misuse of state funds.)
- The assumption that the state's clean-up will occur soon enough to require adjustments to this year's budget. This assumption underlies the claim that the city should devote more money in this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities.
- The assumption that the clean-up, when it happens, will benefit those parts of the river accessible from the city's facilities. This assumption underlies the claim that the city should devote more money to riverside recreational facilities.
- The assumption that the city government ought to devote more attention to maintaining a recreational facility if demand for that facility increases.
- The assumption that the city should finance the new project and not some other agency or group (public or private).

Should any of the above assumptions prove unwarranted, the implications are:

- That the logic of the argument falls apart/is invalid/is unsound
- That the state and city are spending their funds unnecessarily

To view scored sample essay responses and reader commentary on this sample topic, see Appendix B on pages 96–104.

Introduction to the Verbal Reasoning Measure

The Verbal Reasoning measure assesses your ability to analyze and evaluate written material and synthesize information obtained from it, analyze relationships among component parts of sentences and recognize relationships among words and concepts.

Verbal Reasoning questions appear in several formats, each of which is discussed in detail below. About half of the measure requires you to read passages and answer questions on those passages.

The other half requires you to read, interpret and complete existing sentences, groups of sentences or paragraphs.

Verbal Reasoning Question Types

The Verbal Reasoning measure contains three types of questions:

- Reading Comprehension questions
- Text Completion questions
- Sentence Equivalence questions

Reading Comprehension Questions

Reading Comprehension questions are designed to test a wide range of abilities that are required in order to read and understand the kinds of prose commonly encountered in graduate school. Those abilities include:

- Understanding the meaning of individual words and sentences
- Understanding the meaning of paragraphs and larger bodies of text
- Distinguishing between minor and major points
- Summarizing a passage
- Drawing conclusions from the information provided
- Reasoning from incomplete data to infer missing information
- Understanding the structure of a text in terms of how the parts relate to one another
- Identifying the author's assumptions and perspective
- Analyzing a text and reaching conclusions about it
- Identifying strengths and weaknesses of a position
- Developing and considering alternative explanations

As this list implies, reading and understanding a piece of text requires far more than a passive understanding of the words and sentences it contains; it requires active engagement with the text, asking questions, formulating and evaluating hypotheses and reflecting on the relationship of the particular text to other texts and information.

Each Reading Comprehension question is based on a passage that may range in length from one paragraph to several paragraphs. The test contains 12 to 15 passages, the majority of which are one paragraph in length and only one or two of which are several paragraphs long. Passages are drawn from the physical sciences, biological sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities and everyday topics and are based on material found in books and periodicals, both academic and nonacademic.

Typically, about half of the questions on the test will be based on passages, and the number of questions based on a given passage can range from one to six. Questions can cover any of the topics listed above, from the meaning of a particular word to assessing evidence that might support or weaken points made in the passage. Many, but not all, of the questions are standard multiple-choice questions, in which you are required to select a single answer choice, and others ask you to select multiple answer choices.

General Advice

- Reading passages are drawn from many different disciplines and sources, so you may encounter material with which you are not familiar. Do not be discouraged if you encounter unfamiliar material; all the questions can be answered on the basis of the information provided in the passage. However, if you encounter a passage that seems particularly hard or unfamiliar, you may want to save it for last.
- Read and analyze the passage carefully before trying to answer any of the questions, and pay attention to clues that help you understand less explicit aspects of the passage.
  - Try to distinguish main ideas from supporting ideas or evidence.
  - Try to distinguish ideas that the author is advancing from those he or she is merely reporting.
  - Try to distinguish ideas that the author is strongly committed to from those he or she advances as hypothetical or speculative.
  - Try to identify the main transitions from one idea to the next.
  - Try to identify the relationship between different ideas. For example:
    - Are they contrasting? Are they consistent?
    - Does one support the other?
    - Does one spell the other out in greater detail?
    - Does one apply the other to a particular circumstance?
- Read each question carefully and be certain that you understand exactly what is being asked.
- Answer each question on the basis of the information provided in the passage and do not rely on outside knowledge. Sometimes your own views or opinions may conflict with those presented in a passage; if this happens, take special care to work within the context provided by the passage. You should not expect to agree with everything you encounter in the reading passages.

Reading Comprehension Multiple-choice Questions—Select One Answer Choice

These questions are standard multiple-choice questions with five answer choices, of which you must select one.

Tips for Answering

- Read *all* the answer choices before making your selection, even if you think you know the correct answer in advance.
- The correct answer choice is the one that most accurately and most completely answers the question posed; be careful not to be misled by choices that are only partially true or only partially answer the question. Also, be careful not to pick a choice simply because it is a true statement.
- When the question asks about the meaning of a word in the passage, be sure the answer choice you select correctly represents the way the word is being used in the passage. Many words have different meanings when used in different contexts.

Reading Comprehension Multiple-choice Questions—Select One or More Answer Choices

These questions provide three answer choices and ask you to select all that are correct; one, two or all three of the answer choices may be correct. To gain credit for these questions, you must select all the correct choices, and only those; there is no credit for partially correct answers.

Tips for Answering

- Evaluate each answer choice separately on its own merits; when evaluating one choice, do not take the others into account.
- A correct answer choice accurately and completely answers the question posed; be careful not to be misled by choices that are only partially true or only partially answer the question. Also, be careful not to pick a choice simply because it is a true statement.
- Do not be disturbed if you think all three answer choices are correct, since questions of this type can have up to three correct answer choices.

Important Note: In some test preparation materials, you may see references to a third type of Reading Comprehension question, "Select in Passage." Because these questions depend on the use of the computer, they do not appear on the paper-based test. Similar multiple-choice questions are used in their place.

Sample Questions

Questions 1 and 2 are based on this passage

> Reviving the practice of using elements of popular music in classical composition, an approach that had been in hibernation in the United States during the 1960s, composer Philip Glass (born 1937) embraced the ethos of popular music in his compositions. Glass based two symphonies on music by rock musicians David Bowie and Brian Eno, but the symphonies' sound is distinctively his. Popular elements do not appear out of place in Glass's classical music, which from its early days has shared certain harmonies and rhythms with rock music. Yet this use of popular elements has not made Glass a composer of popular music. His music is not a version of popular music packaged to attract classical listeners; it is high art for listeners steeped in rock rather than the classics.

Directions: Select only one answer choice.

1. The passage addresses which of the following issues related to Glass's use of popular elements in his classical compositions?

   Ⓐ How it is regarded by listeners who prefer rock to the classics
   Ⓑ How it has affected the commercial success of Glass's music
   Ⓒ Whether it has contributed to a revival of interest among other composers in using popular elements in their compositions
   Ⓓ Whether it has had a detrimental effect on Glass's reputation as a composer of classical music
   Ⓔ Whether it has caused certain of Glass's works to be derivative in quality

Directions: Consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

2. The passage suggests that Glass's work displays which of the following qualities?

   Ⓐ A return to the use of popular music in classical compositions
   Ⓑ An attempt to elevate rock music to an artistic status more closely approximating that of classical music
   Ⓒ A long-standing tendency to incorporate elements from two apparently disparate musical styles

Explanation

The passage describes in general terms how Philip Glass uses popular music in his classical compositions and explores how Glass can do this without being imitative. Note that there are no opposing views discussed; the author is simply presenting his or her views.

Question 1: One of the important points that the passage makes is that when Glass uses popular elements in his music, the result is very much his own creation (it is "distinctively his"). In other words, the music is far from being derivative. Thus one issue that the passage addresses is the one referred to in answer Choice E—it answers it in the negative. The passage does not discuss the impact of Glass's use of popular elements on listeners, on the commercial success of his music, on other composers or on Glass's reputation, so none of Choices A through D is correct.

The correct answer is Choice E.

Question 2: To answer this question, it is important to assess each answer choice independently. Since the passage says that Glass revived the use of popular music in classical compositions, answer Choice A is clearly correct. On the other hand, the passage also denies that Glass composes popular music or packages it in a way to elevate its status, so answer Choice B is incorrect. Finally, since Glass's style has always mixed elements of rock with classical elements, answer Choice C is correct.

Thus the correct answer is Choice A and Choice C.

Text Completion Questions

As mentioned earlier, skilled readers do not simply absorb the information presented on the page; instead, they maintain a constant attitude of interpretation and evaluation, reasoning from what they have read so far to create a picture of the whole and revising that picture as they go. Text Completion questions test this ability by omitting crucial words from short passages and asking the test taker to use the remaining information in the passage as a basis for selecting words or short phrases to fill the blanks and create a coherent, meaningful whole.

Question Structure

- Passage composed of one to five sentences
- One to three blanks
- Three answer choices per blank (five answer choices in the case of a single blank)
- The answer choices for different blanks function independently; i.e., selecting one choice for one blank does not affect what choices you can select for another blank
- Single correct answer, consisting of one choice for each blank; no credit for partially correct answers

Tips for Answering

Do not merely try to consider each possible combination of answers; doing so will take too long and is open to error. Instead, try to analyze the passage in the following way:

- Read through the passage to get an overall sense of it.
- Identify words or phrases that seem particularly significant, either because they emphasize the structure of the passage (words like *although* or *moreover*) or because they are central to understanding what the passage is about.
- Try to fill in the blanks with words or phrases that seem to complete the sentence, then see if similar words are offered among the answer choices.
- Do not assume that the first blank is the one that should be filled first; perhaps one of the other blanks is easier to fill first. Select your choice for that blank, and then see whether you can complete another blank. If none of the choices for the other blank seem to make sense, go back and reconsider your first selection.
- When you have made your selection for each blank, check to make sure the passage is logically, grammatically and stylistically coherent.

Sample Questions

Directions: For each blank, select one entry from the corresponding column of choices. Fill all blanks in the way that best completes the text.

1. It is refreshing to read a book about our planet by an author who does not allow facts to be (i)_____ by politics: well aware of the political disputes about the effects of human activities on climate and biodiversity, this author does not permit them to (ii)_____ his comprehensive description of what we know about our biosphere. He emphasizes the enormous gaps in our knowledge, the sparseness of our observations, and the (iii)_____, calling attention to the many aspects of planetary evolution that must be better understood before we can accurately diagnose the condition of our planet.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)	Blank (iii)
Ⓐ overshadowed	Ⓓ enhance	Ⓖ plausibility of our hypotheses
Ⓑ invalidated	Ⓔ obscure	Ⓗ certainty of our entitlement
Ⓒ illuminated	Ⓕ underscore	Ⓘ superficiality of our theories

Explanation

The overall tone of the passage is clearly complimentary. To understand what the author of the book is being complimented on, it is useful to focus on the second blank. Here, we must determine what word would indicate something that the author is praised for not permitting. The only answer choice that fits the case is "obscure," since enhancing and underscoring are generally good things to do, not things one should refrain from doing. Choosing "obscure" clarifies the choice for the first blank; the only choice that fits well with "obscure" is "overshadowed." Notice that trying to fill blank (i) without filling blank (ii) first is hard—each choice has at least some initial plausibility. Since the third blank requires a phrase that matches "enormous gaps" and "sparseness of our observations," the best choice is "superficiality of our theories."

Thus the correct answer is Choice A (overshadowed), Choice E (obscure) and Choice I (superficiality of our theories).

2. Vain and prone to violence, Caravaggio could not handle success: the more his (i)_____ as an artist increased, the more (ii)_____ his life became.

Blank (i)	Blank (ii)
Ⓐ temperance	Ⓓ tumultuous
Ⓑ notoriety	Ⓔ providential
Ⓒ eminence	Ⓕ dispassionate

Explanation

In this sentence, what follows the colon must explain or spell out what precedes it. So, roughly, what the second part must say is that as Caravaggio became more successful, his life got more out of control. When one looks for words to fill the blanks, it becomes clear that "tumultuous" is the best fit for blank (ii), since neither of the other choices suggests being out of control. And for blank (i), the best choice is "eminence," since to increase in eminence is a consequence of becoming more successful. It is true that Caravaggio might also increase in notoriety, but an increase in notoriety as an artist is not as clear a sign of success as an increase in eminence.

Thus the correct answer is Choice C (eminence) and Choice D (tumultuous).

3. In parts of the Arctic, the land grades into the landfast ice so _____ that you can walk off the coast and not know you are over the hidden sea.

Ⓐ permanently
Ⓑ imperceptibly
Ⓒ irregularly
Ⓓ precariously
Ⓔ relentlessly

Explanation

The word that fills the blank has to characterize how the land grades into the ice in a way that explains how you can walk off the coast and over the sea without knowing it. The word that does that is "imperceptibly;" if the land grades imperceptibly into the ice, you might well not know that you had left the land. Describing the shift from land to ice as permanent, irregular, precarious or relentless would not help to explain how you would fail to know.

Thus the correct answer is Choice B (imperceptibly).

Sentence Equivalence Questions

Like Text Completion questions, Sentence Equivalence questions test the ability to reach a conclusion about how a passage should be completed on the basis of partial information, but to a greater extent they focus on the meaning of the completed whole. Sentence Equivalence questions consist of a single sentence with just one blank, and they ask you to find two answer choices that lead to a complete, coherent sentence while producing sentences that mean the same thing.

Question Structure

- Consists of a single sentence, one blank, and six answer choices.
- Requires you to select **two** of the answer choices; no credit for partially correct answers.

Tips for Answering

Do not simply look among the answer choices for two words that mean the same thing. This can be misleading for two reasons. First, the choices may contain pairs of words that mean the same thing but do not fit coherently into the sentence. Second, the pair of words that do constitute the correct answer may not mean exactly the same thing, since all that matters is that the resultant sentences mean the same thing.

- Read the sentence to get an overall sense of it.
- Identify words or phrases that seem particularly significant, either because they emphasize the structure of the sentence (words like *although* or *moreover*) or because they are central to understanding what the sentence is about.
- Try to fill in the blank with a word that seems appropriate to you and then see if two similar words are offered among the answer choices. If you find some word that is similar to what you are expecting but cannot find a second one, do not become fixated on your interpretation; instead, see whether there are other words among the choices that can be used to fill the blank coherently.
- When you have selected your pair of answer choices, check to make sure that each one produces a sentence that is logically, grammatically and stylistically coherent, and that the two sentences mean the same thing.

Sample Question

Directions: Select the <u>two</u> answer choices that, when used to complete the sentence, fit the meaning of the sentence as a whole <u>and</u> produce completed sentences that are alike in meaning.

1. Although it does contain some pioneering ideas, one would hardly characterize the work as _____.

Ⓐ orthodox
Ⓑ eccentric
Ⓒ original
Ⓓ trifling
Ⓔ conventional
Ⓕ innovative

Explanation

The word "Although" is a crucial signpost here. The work contains some pioneering ideas, but apparently it is not overall a pioneering work. Thus the two words that could fill the blank appropriately are "original" and "innovative." Note that "orthodox" and "conventional" are two words that are very similar in meaning, but neither one completes the sentence sensibly.

Thus the correct answer is Choice C (original) and Choice F (innovative).

INTERPRETATIVE REPORTING

Introduction:

The limitations of straight news reporting inevitably gave rise to other methods of reporting, the first of which we will consider in this post. It is called interpretative reporting. As its name implies, it is the method of reporting that seeks to add meaning to news reports by breaking down the issues raised in them. The skeletal report given in straight news is often unable to answer many of the readers' questions. For example, you read a story that Nigeria's Central Bank (CBN) has banned cryptocurrency accounts in the country and you want to know what cryptocurrency is. You wonder how it differs from regular currency like Naira and Pound Sterling. You also want to know why the CBN took this stance. In other words, you are curious about the benefits and dangers of dealing in cryptocurrencies and what the position of other countries is on it. You are not likely to find the answers to all these questions in a straight news story. But an interpretative story will furnish you with them and more. As we consider the characteristics of interpretative reports, their similarities to and differences from straight news stories and their usefulness will become apparent.

Characteristics of interpretative reports

• Just like straight news stories, interpretative reports are written about important matters which people are eager to know more about-symptoms of a new disease, ways of preventing its spread and treatment options available or in the works; the provisions of a new bill in parliament, who will benefit from it, who is sponsoring it, who is opposing it and why?

• The interpretative report is not written with the straight-forward approach of straight news. The writer can decide to use a preamble to introduce the subject of the story. For example, a story that explains how kidnapping negotiations are done can start with two or three paragraphs narrating the experience of a family whose member was recently kidnapped, showing how heart-wrenching their ordeal had been before getting to the issue of negotiations that determine the fate of victims.

• Interpretative reports are not written with the simplest language possible as straight news

stories are. The writers can use slightly elevated and adorned language but they are not to use hi-falutin expressions or grandiose language that make their reports incomprehensible to many readers. Literary devices, like familiar, not obscure, figures of speech, are welcome in interpretative reports. The attractive language helps to keep the interest of readers since the explanations might get lengthy and would be boring if presented in plain language.

• Interpretative reports are not usually as timely as straight news reports. When something important happens, the first stories on it would usually come in straight news format. Subsequently, reporters in that area (politics, education …) take some time to research the matter and write fuller reports on it.

• Interpretative reports are not as objective as straight news stories, not because the writers are allowed to clearly editorialise but because in writing such long reports, they have more latitude to add from their own store of knowledge and choose sources in such a way that weights the matter less evenly than straight news writers would.

• Interpretative reporters are not bound to any order of writing unlike straight news writers who use the inverted pyramid. An interpretative report can start with, among other things, a quotation from one of the sources in the story, an epigram, a figurative expression or a narration of a key scene from the original event that warranted the report. Sometimes, deciding how to start the report can be tasking as the options abound unlike straight news which has a laid-down format.

Beyond his choice of a lead, how the vast volume of material gathered for the report is woven together is left to the discretion of the writer. The bottom line is that the report must carry the reader along from start to finish since unlike a straight news story where reading the beginning gives one the gist of the story, the interpretative report needs to be read through to be totally useful.

• The interpretative report is usually lengthy. As stated earlier, it seeks to elaborate on the issues raised in straight news or, as some have stated, add flesh to the skeleton of straight news. What are the things it adds?

Elements of news interpretation

By elements of news interpretation, we mean the things the interpretative report needs to include to be comprehensive. This refers to those points which help to give the reader a broad and deep understanding of the subject of the report often lacking or only briefly touched in straight news reports about it. Note that the interpretative report should contain the 5Ws and H of the story it is elaborating on to avoid talking over the heads of readers who may not have the basic facts of the story. They are presented hereunder as things the journalist should do.

• Explanation of meaning: In covering issues and events, journalists come across unfamiliar terms, some of them technical or foreign. The absence of a proper explanation (in terms a lay person can understand) of what they mean invariably hampers the understanding of the story at large. My example on cryptocurrencies in the Introduction refers.

• Ranking: Interpretative reports help readers to understand the relative ranking of persons,

events and other things in the news. This is not only done by how much time or space is devoted to them but by the use of words that clearly spell out how significant they are, like "history-making event" and "the most critical decision of this administration."

• Backgrounding: Interpretative reports help show the history of what they discuss. If someone wins a public office, for instance, their family, education, professional career and political journey to date would be provided to the public. If a war breaks out, the beginnings of the conflict will be chronicled down to the escalations that resulted in the war, along with efforts at mediation along the way.

• Building of context: There are interrelationships between many people, issues and events that are not obvious to the average person. Individual stories written separately in straight news fashion do not always show these interconnections but interpretative reports do. What is the link between a political conflict and religious divisions in the country affected? How does the devaluation of a country's currency affect the rest of its economy? Since no event occurs in a vacuum, showing its interrelatedness with other events is an important aspect of interpretative reporting.

• Tracing of precedence: This involves finding out if the event being reported is the first of its kind and if not, has it happened locally or elsewhere? Also, how regularly has it happened? Using the current news of the kidnapping of over 300 girls from a secondary school in Zamfara State, Nigeria, the reporter goes back to the kidnapping of 276 girls from a girls' secondary school in Chibok, Borno State in April.2014 and the other incidents of mass abduction that have taken place since then. It is also important to tell the reader if this is a uniquely Nigerian problem or if mass kidnapping of school children is also experienced in other countries with problems of insecurity.

• Advancing likely causes and effects: One question that rings in the minds of readers of many stories is, "Why?" The straight news story does not often have the correct or full answer because it is too close to the event in time. Further digging helps the interpretative reporter to arrive at more accurate and comprehensive answers. For example, in the case of what appears to be a suicide but where no note has been found, friends and neighbours may proffer what they think may have led to the deceased taking his life, say, financial or health troubles. But by the time the interpretative report is published, more information may be available, say, through a file in the deceased's laptop, that shows the actual cause of the suicide to be romantic trouble or that even suggests there was foul play, requiring a homicide investigation. In adducing possible causes of a matter, the reporter should rely on facts and authorities and not make wild or biased guesses. Still, he should leave the door open to further discoveries down the line that may question his conclusions.

The same goes for advancing possible effects or implications of an action or event.

• Localisation of the story: It is important to show readers why they should be interested in a story by showing the relevance of the issue it is about to their lives. If you discuss a disease like Lassa fever without showing people they are living in an area where there is an outbreak or that certain circumstances which they live under or are oblivious about could predispose them to contracting the disease, they may feel unconcerned. If you do not explain the full ramifications of a new government regulation to show people how it may

affect them and their families, they may not be interested. It is called bringing the story home to the reader.

Another way of doing this is showing how the story affects the readers' compatriots, faith community, racial group or idols (such as celebrities and political icons they admire). This evokes an attachment to the story or what in news values is called psychological proximity, no matter how far away the story took place. For example, in reporting the recent winter storm in Texas, if a Nigerian singer was caught in it while holidaying abroad, merely mentioning that will ignite the interest of Nigerian readers.

Localisation can also be accomplished by including the local equivalents of things in the story (like weights and other measures). This would require conversion from pounds and ounces to kilogrammes and grammes, from foreign currencies to local, for instance. This enhances understanding of the story.

• Presenting diverse opinions: An important part of any news report is people's reaction to the issue covered. While straight news stories do include the opinions of sources, interpretative reports contain more of these by virtue of the research process that precedes their writing and the length of the resulting stories. Take the Nigerian military's clashes with the Eastern Security Network (ESN) formed by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as an example. A story on that, beyond the accounts of those directly involved or affected, would need the views of supporters and opponents of IPOB, both those who share ethnicity with it (Igbos) and people of other ethnic groups in Nigeria. It would need the views of military and federal government sources, state governors in the South-East geopolitical zone where IPOB operates, IPOB leaders, human rights advocates and constitutional experts too who will weigh in on the constitutionality of IPOB's formation of this security outfit or otherwise.

Common Types of Figurative Language

There are many, many types of figures of speech that can be involved in figurative language. Some of the most common are:

- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unrelated things by stating that one thing is another thing, even though this isn't literally true. For example, the phrase "her lips are a blooming rose" obviously doesn't literally mean what it says—it's a metaphor that makes a comparison between the red beauty and promise of a blooming rose with that of the lips of the woman being described.
- **Simile:** A simile, like a metaphor, makes a comparison between two unrelated things. However, instead of stating that one thing *is* another thing (as in metaphor), a simile states that one thing is *like* another thing. An example of a simile would be to say "they fought like cats and dogs."
- **Oxymoron:** An oxymoron pairs contradictory words in order to express new or complex meanings. In the phrase "parting is such sweet sorrow" from *Romeo and Juliet*, "sweet sorrow" is an oxymoron that captures the complex and simultaneous feelings of pain and pleasure associated with passionate love.
- **Hyperbole:** Hyperbole is an intentional exaggeration of the truth, used to emphasize the importance of something or to create a comic effect. An example of a hyperbole is to say that a backpack "weighs a ton." No backpack literally weighs a ton, but to say "my backpack weighs ten pounds" doesn't effectively communicate how burdensome a heavy backpack feels.
- **Personification:** In personification, non-human things are described as having human attributes, as in the sentence, "The rain poured down on the wedding guests, indifferent to their plans." Describing the rain as "indifferent" is an example of personification, because rain can't be "indifferent," nor can it feel any other human emotion.
- **Idiom:** An idiom is a phrase that, through general usage within a particular group or society, has gained a meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the words. The phrase "it's raining cats and dogs" is known to most Americans to mean that it's raining hard, but an English-speaking foreigner in the United States might find the phrase totally confusing.
- **Onomatopoeia:** Onomatopoeia is a figure of speech in which words evoke the actual sound of the thing they refer to or describe. The “boom” of a firework exploding, the “tick tock” of a clock, and the “ding dong” of a doorbell are all examples of onomatopoeia.
- **Synecdoche:** In synecdoche, a *part* of something is used to refer to its *whole*. For example, "The captain commands one hundred sails" is a synecdoche that uses "sails" to refer to ships—ships being the thing of which a sail is a part.
- **Metonymy:** Metonymy is a figure of speech in which an object or concept is referred to not by its own name, but instead by the name of something closely associated with it. For example, in "Wall Street prefers lower taxes," the New York City street that was the original home of the New York Stock Exchange stands in for (or is a "metonym" for) the entire American financial industry.
- **Alliteration:** In alliteration, the same sound repeats in a group of words, such as the “b” sound in: “Bob brought the box of bricks to the basement.” Alliteration uses repetition to create a musical effect that helps phrases to stand out from the language around them.
- **Assonance:** The repetition of vowel sounds repeat in nearby words, such as the "ee" sound: "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." Like alliteration, assonance uses repeated sounds to create a musical effect in which words echo one another.

Figurative Language vs. Imagery

Many people (and websites) argue that imagery is a type of figurative language. That is actually incorrect. Imagery refers to a writers use of vivid and descriptive language to appeal to the reader's senses and more deeply evoke places, things, emotions, and more. The following sentence uses imagery to give the reader a sense of how what is being described looks, feels, smells, and sounds:

> The night was dark and humid, the scent of rotting vegetation hung in the air, and only the sound of mosquitoes broke the quiet of the swamp.

This sentence uses *no* figurative language. Every word means exactly what it says, and the sentence is still an example of the use of imagery. That said, imagery *can* use figurative language, often to powerful effect:

> The night was dark and humid, heavy with a scent of rotting vegetation like a great-aunt's heavy and inescapable perfume, and only the whining buzz of mosquitoes broke the silence of the swamp.

In this sentence, the description has been made more powerful through the use of a simile ("like a great-aunt's..."), onomatopoeia ("whining buzz," which not only describes but actually sounds like the noise made by mosquitoes), and even a bit of alliteration in the "silence of the swamp."

To sum up: imagery is *not* a form of figurative language. But a writer can enhance his or her effort to write imagery through the use of figurative language.

Figurative Language Examples

Figurative language is more interesting, lively, beautiful, and memorable than language that's purely literal. Figurative language is found in all sorts of writing, from poetry to prose to speeches to song lyrics, and is also a common part of spoken speech. The examples below show a variety of different types of figures of speech. You can see many more examples of each type at their own specific LitChart entries.

Figurative Language Example: Metaphor

Metaphor in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo uses the following metaphor in Act 2 Scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*, after sneaking into Juliet's garden and catching a glimpse of her on her balcony:

> But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
> It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Romeo compares Juliet to the sun not only to describe how radiantly beautiful she is, but also to convey the full extent of her power over him. He's so taken with Juliet that her appearances and disappearances affect him like those of the sun. His life "revolves" around Juliet like the earth orbits the sun.

Figurative Language Example: Simile

In this example of a simile from *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim emerges from an underground slaughterhouse where he has been held prisoner by the Germans during the deadly World War II firebombing of Dresden:

> It wasn't safe to come out of the shelter until noon the next day. When the Americans and their guards did come out, the sky was black with smoke. The sun was an angry little pinhead. Dresden was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighborhood was dead.

Vonnegut uses simile to compare the bombed city of Dresden to the moon in order to capture the totality of the devastation—the city is so lifeless that it is like the barren moon.

Figurative Language Example: Oxymoron

These lines from Chapter 7 of Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* describe an encounter between Robert Jordan, a young American soldier fighting in the Spanish Civil War, and his lover María.

> She held herself tight to him and her lips looked for his and then found them and were against them and he felt her, fresh, new and smooth and young and lovely with the warm, scalding coolness and unbelievable to be there in the robe that was as familiar as his clothes, or his shoes, or his duty and then she said, frightenedly, “And now let us do quickly what it is we do so that the other is all gone.”

The couple's relationship becomes a bright spot for both of them in the midst of war, but ultimately also a source of pain and confusion for Jordan, as he struggles to balance his obligation to fight with his desire to live happily by Maria's side. The contradiction contained within the oxymoron "scalding coolness" emphasizes the couple's conflicting emotions and impossible situation.

Figurative Language Example: Hyperbole

Elizabeth Bennet, the most free-spirited character in *Pride and Prejudice*, refuses Mr. Darcy's first marriage proposal with a string of hyperbole:

> From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immoveable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry.

Elizabeth's closing statement, that Darcy is the "last man in the world" whom she would ever marry, is an obvious hyperbole. It's hard to believe that Elizabeth would rather marry, say, an axe murderer or a diseased pirate than Mr. Darcy. Even beyond the obvious exaggeration, Austen's use of hyperbole in this exchange hints at the fact that Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy are more complicated than she admits, even to herself. Austen drops various hints throughout the beginning of the novel that Elizabeth feels something beyond mere dislike for Darcy. Taken together with these hints, Elizabeth's hyperbolic statements seem designed to convince not only Darcy, but also *herself,* that their relationship has no future.

Figurative Language Example: Personification

In Chapter 1 of *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne describes a wild rose bush that grows in front of Salem's gloomy wooden jail:

> But, on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him.

In the context of the novel's setting in 17th century Boston, this rose bush, which grows wild in front of an establishment dedicated to enforcing harsh puritan values, symbolizes those elements of human nature that cannot be repressed, no matter how strict a community's moral code may be: desire, fertility, and a love of beauty. By personifying the rosebush as "offering" its blossoms to reflect Nature's pity (Nature is also personified here as having a "heart"), Hawthorne turns the *passive* coincidence of the rosebush's location into an image of human nature *actively* resisting its constraints.

Figurative Language Example: Idiom

Figurative Language Example: Onomatopoeia

In Act 3, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Caliban uses onomatopoeia to convey the noises of the island.

> Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
> Sounds, and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices...

The use of onomatopoeia makes the audience *feel* the sounds on the island, rather than just have to take Caliban's word about there being noises.

Figurative Language Example: Synecdoche

In Act 4, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, an angry Macbeth kicks out a servant by saying:

> Take thy face hence.

Here, "thy face" stands in for "you." Macbeth is simply telling the servant to leave, but his use of synecdoche makes the tone of his command more harsh and insulting because he uses synecdoche to treat the servant not as a person but as an object, a body part.

Figurative Language Example: Metonymy

In his song "Juicy," Notorious B.I.G. raps:

> Now I'm in the limelight 'cause I rhyme tight

Here he's using "limelight" as a metonymy for fame (a "limelight" was a kind of spotlight used in old theaters, and so it came to be associated with the fame of being in the spotlight). Biggie's use of metonymy here also sets him up for a sweet rhyme.

Figurative Language Example: Alliteration

In his song "Rap God," Eminem shows his incredible lyrical dexterity by loading up the alliteration:

> So I wanna make sure, somewhere in this chicken scratch I
> Scribble and doodle enough rhymes
> To maybe try to help get some people through tough times
> But I gotta keep a few punchlines
> Just in case, ‘cause even you unsigned
> Rappers are hungry looking at me like it's lunchtime…

Why Do Writers Use Figurative Language?

The term figurative language refers to a whole host of different figures of speech, so it's difficult to provide a single definitive answer to why writers use figurative language. That said, writers use figurative language for a wide variety of reasons:

- **Interest and beauty:** Figurative language allows writes to express descriptions, ideas, and more in ways that are unique and beautiful.
- **Complexity and power:** Because figurative language can create meanings that go beyond the literal, it can capture complex ideas, feelings, descriptions, or truths that cause readers to see things in a new way, or more closely mirror the complex reality of the world.
- **Visceral affect:** Because figurative language can both impact the rhythm and sound of language, and also connect the abstract (say, love) with the concrete (say, a rose), it can help language make an almost physical impact on a reader.
- **Humor:** By allowing a writer to layer additional meanings over literal meanings, or even to imply intended meanings that are the opposite of the literal meaning, figurative language gives writers all sorts of options for creating humor in their writing.
- **Realism:** People speak and even think in terms of the sorts of comparisons that underlie so much figurative language. Rather than being flowery, figurative language allows writers to describe things in ways that match how people really think about them, and to create characters who themselves feel real.

In general, figurative language often makes writing feel at once more accessible and powerful, more colorful, surprising, and deep.

IMAGERY

Definition of Imagery

As a literary device, imagery consists of descriptive language that can function as a way for the reader to better imagine the world of the piece of literature and also add symbolism to the work. Imagery draws on the five senses, namely the details of **taste**, **touch**, **sight**, **smell**, and **sound**. Imagery can also pertain to details about movement or a sense of a body in motion (kinesthetic imagery) or the emotions or sensations of a person, such as fear or hunger (organic imagery or subjective imagery). Using imagery helps the reader develop a more fully realized understanding of the imaginary world that the author has created.

Common Examples of Imagery

We use imagery in everyday speech to convey our meaning. Here are some examples of imagery from each of the five senses:

- **Taste**: The familiar tang of his grandmother's cranberry sauce reminded him of his youth.
- **Sound**: The concert was so loud that her ears rang for days afterward.
- **Sight**: The sunset was the most gorgeous they'd ever seen; the clouds were edged with pink and gold.
- **Smell**: After eating the curry, his breath reeked of garlic.
- **Touch**: The tree bark was rough against her skin.

♦ ♦ ♦

Significance of Imagery in Literature

Imagery examples are prevalent in all types of literature from cultures around the world. Poets, novelists, and playwrights use imagery for many reasons. One of the key usages is that the imagery in a piece can help create mood, such as the cliché opening "It was a dark and stormy night." While this line is too hackneyed for any author to actually use it, it is a good example of imagery in that the reader immediately pictures the kind of setting in which the story may take place. This particular imagery also creates a mood of foreboding. Indeed, even Shakespeare used this type of opening for his famous play *MacBeth*: the three witches in the beginning speak of the "thunder, lightning [and] rain" and the "fog and filthy air."

While an author may use imagery just to help readers understand the fictive world, details of imagery often can be read symbolically. In the previous example of *MacBeth*, the thunder and lightning that open the play symbolize both the storm that is already taking place in Scotland and the one that is about to begin once MacBeth takes over the throne. Thus, when analyzing literature it is important to consider the imagery used so as to understand both the mood and the symbolism in the piece.

Examples of Imagery in Literature

Example #1: Taste

> On rainy afternoons, embroidering with a group of friends on the begonia porch, she would lose the thread of the conversation and a tear of nostalgia would salt her palate when she saw the strips of damp earth and the piles of mud that the earthworms had pushed up in the garden. Those secret tastes, defeated in the past by oranges and rhubarb, broke out into an irrepressible urge when she began to weep. She went back to eating earth. The first time she did it almost out of curiosity, sure that the bad taste would be the best cure for the temptation. And, in fact, she could not bear the earth in her mouth. But she persevered, overcome by the growing anxiety, and little by little she was getting back her ancestral appetite, the taste of primary minerals, the unbridled satisfaction of what was the original food.

(*One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez)

This passage from Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* discusses one of the character's pica eating disorder. There are many examples of imagery using the sense of taste, including "a tear would salt her palate," "oranges and rhubarb," and "the taste of primary minerals." The imagery in this excerpt makes the experience of an eating disorder much more vivid and imaginable to the reader.

Example #2: Sound

> My little horse must think it queer
> To stop without a farmhouse near
> Between the woods and frozen lake
> The darkest evening of the year.
>
> He gives his harness bells a shake
> To ask if there is some mistake.
> The only other sound's the sweep
> Of easy wind and downy flake.

("Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost)

When most people think of Robert Frost's famous poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," the final refrain comes to mind: "And miles to go before I sleep." Yet the short poem contains many imagery examples that are simple yet set the scene well. In this excerpt, there is a juxtaposition of two sounds: the bright noise of the horse's harness bells and the nearly silent sound of wind and snowflake. While the reader knows that this is a dark night, the sense of sound makes the scene even more realistic.

Example #3: Sight

> Outside, even through the shut window-pane, the world looked cold. Down in the street little eddies of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, and though the sun was shining and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no colour in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The black mustachioed face gazed down from every commanding corner. There was one on the house-front immediately opposite. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said, while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston's own. Down at street level another poster, torn at one corner, flapped fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word INGSOC. In the far distance a helicopter skimmed down between the roofs, hovered for an instant like a bluebottle, and darted away again with a curving flight.

(*1984* by George Orwell)

One of the central conceits of George Orwell's classic dystopian novel *1984* is the all-pervasive surveillance of this society. This is a world that has its eyes constantly open—"Big Brother is watching you" is the motto of the society—yet the world itself is almost colorless. All that the main character, Winston, sees is "whirling dust," "torn paper," and posters of a "black mustachioed face" with "dark eyes." These sensory details contribute to a general feeling of unease and foreshadow the way in which the world appears more chilling as the novel goes on.

Example #4: Smell

> In the period of which we speak, there reigned in the cities a stench barely conceivable to us modern men and women. The streets stank of manure, the courtyards of urine, the stairwells stank of moldering wood and rat droppings, the kitchens of spoiled cabbage and mutton fat; the unaired parlors stank of stale dust, the bedrooms of greasy sheets, damp featherbeds, and the pungently sweet aroma of chamber pots. The stench of sulfur rose from the chimneys, the stench of caustic lyes from the tanneries, and from the slaughterhouses came the stench of congealed blood. People stank of sweat and unwashed clothes; from their mouths came the stench of rotting teeth, from their bellies that of onions, and from their bodies, if they were no longer very young, came the stench of rancid cheese and sour milk and tumorous disease.

(*Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* by Patrick Suskind)

Patrick Suskind's novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* focuses on a character who has a very acute sense of smell. The novel, therefore, has numerous examples of imagery using descriptions of smell. This excerpt comes from the beginning of the novel where Suskind sets up the general palate of smells in eighteenth-century Paris. Using these smells as a backdrop, the reader is better able to understand the importance of the main character's skill as a perfumer. The reader is forced to imagine the range of smells in this novel's era and setting that no longer assault us on a daily basis.

Here's how to write a poem using our fundamentals of poetry:

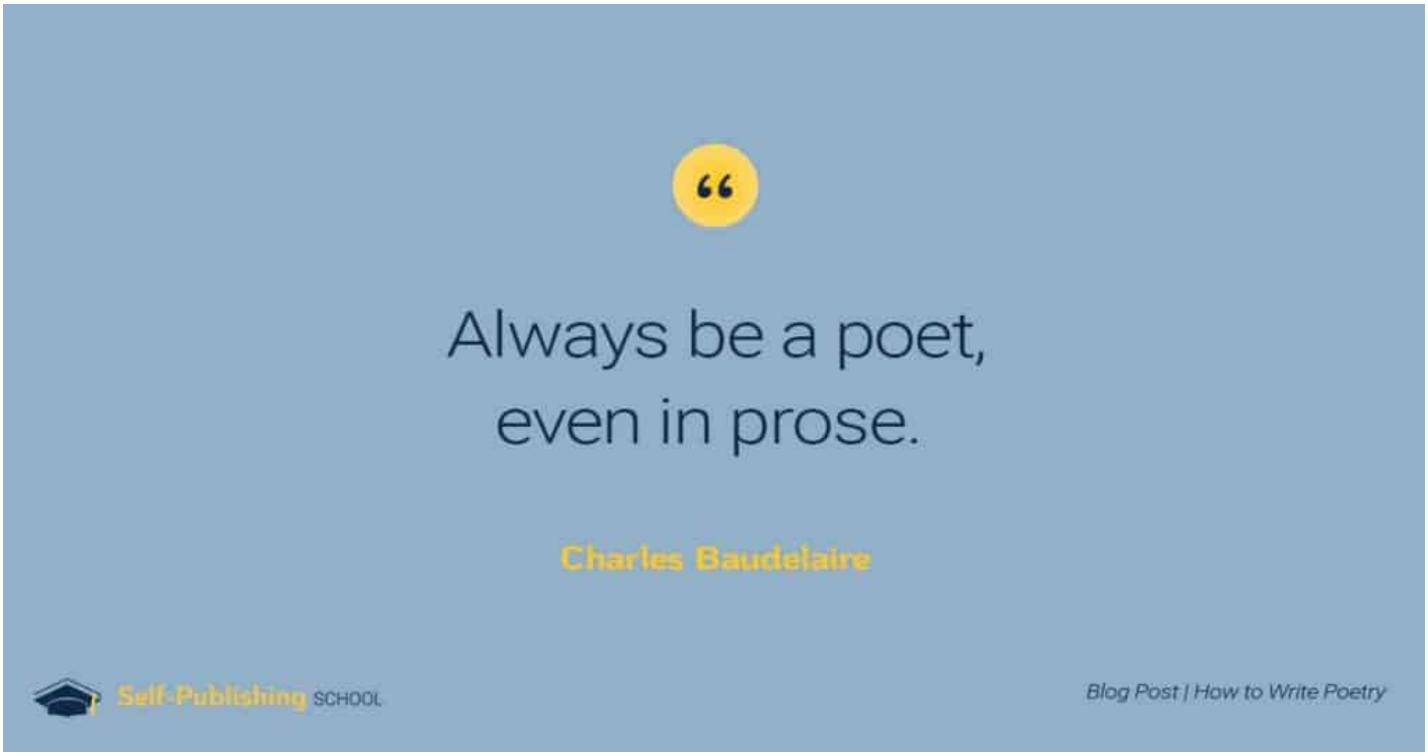
1. Understand the benefits of writing poetry
2. Decide which type of poetry to write
3. Have proper poem structure
4. Include sharp imagery
5. Focus on sound in poetry
6. Define the poem's meaning
7. Have a goal
8. Avoid clichés in your poems
9. Opt for minimalistic poems
10. Refine your poem to perfection

If you're ready to learn what it takes to write (and then potentially publish a book of) good poetry, we've got the help you need.

Benefits of Learning How to Write a Poem

Even if you aren't looking to become a full-time poet, or even attempt to publish a single poem, writing poetry can be beneficial in several ways.

1. *It strengthens your skills in writing solid imagery.* Poetry is a very image-based form of writing, so practicing poetry will improve your imagery in other forms as well.
2. *Poetry is concise and impactful*—it uses strong language, and no more words than are necessary. If you have an understanding of how to write a poem, your prose when writing a novel will become crisper and stronger.
3. *Poetry helps you to connect with emotions in a tangible way*. Other forms of writing have the plot to hide behind—with poetry, all you've got are emotions. (Unless it's a narrative poem, of course.)
4. *You can become a professional poet and earn a living writing.* Even if you just want to enjoy poetry for the above reasons, you can also make a full-time income this way. A great way to get started is to apply for a poetry scholarship in addition to the rest of the tips here.



Types of Poetry

Not all types of poetry are the same, and that means learning how to write a poem involves being familiar with the different types.

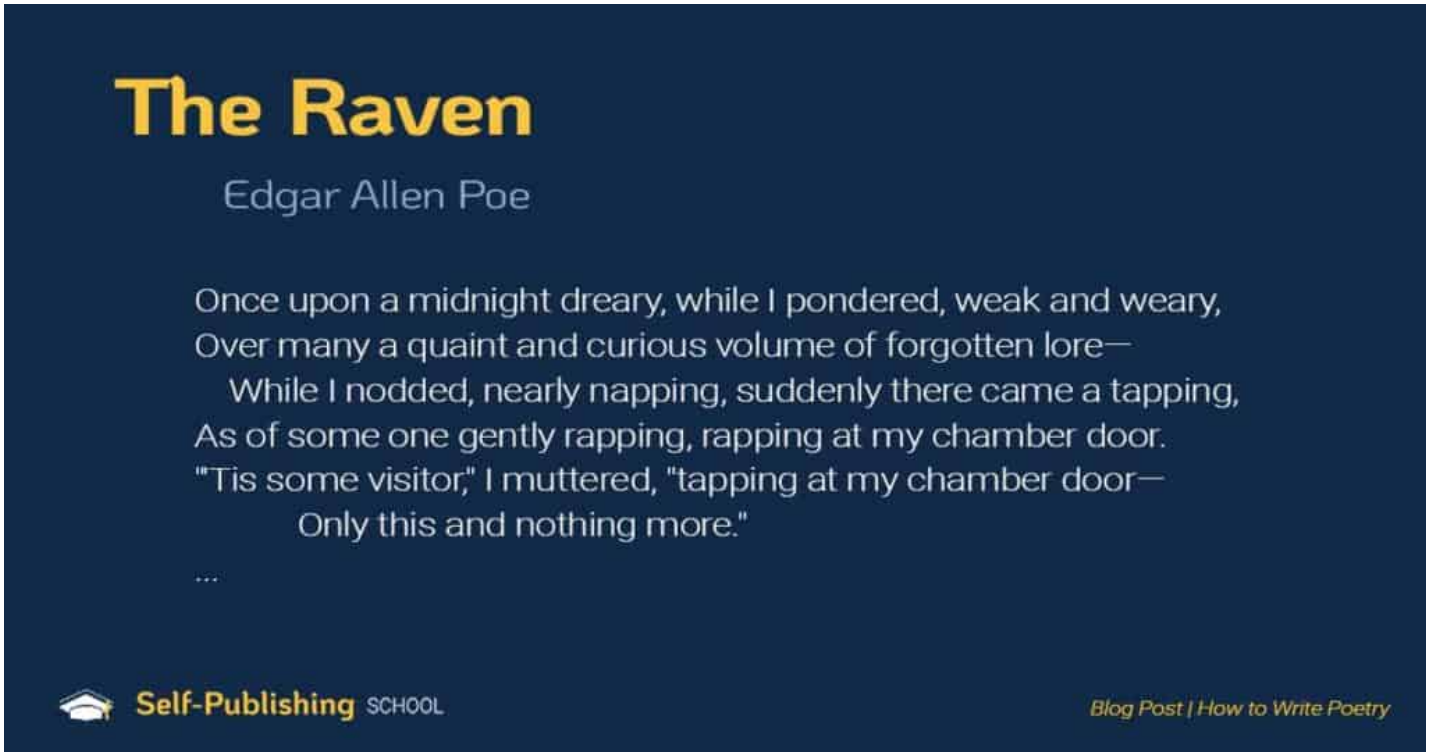
Here are the different types of poetry:

1. *Narrative* – this kind of poem relies on a story. It tells an event and there are often a few extra elements, such as characters, a plot, and a strong narration.
2. *Lyrical* – a lyric poem is similar to a song, and it tends to describe a specific feeling, scene, or state of mind.

You may be familiar with these different types of poetry. For example, a lyrical poem is actually a song. Listening to your favorite radio station is just like hearing a collection of your favorite poems being read to you with some background music.

A narrative poem is, as mentioned above, more like a story told in poetic prose.

Here's a small example of a part of Edgar Allen Poe's famous poem, The Raven:



8 Fundamentals for How to Write a Poem

Poetry can often be subjective. Not every poem will speak to every person.

That being said, there are different attributes that you should learn if you want to know how to write poetry *well* regardless.

#1 – Structure of writing a poem

The structure of a poem can refer to many different things, but we're going to discuss some different forms of poetry, how to use punctuation, and last words.

Form of a Poem

The form of your poem is the physical structure. It can have requirements for rhyme, line length, number of lines/stanzas, etc.

Here are different types of poetry forms:

- *Sonnet* – A short, rhyming poem of 14 lines
- *Haiku* – A poem of 3 lines where the first is 5 syllables, the middle is 7 syllables, and the last is 5.
- *Acrostic* – A poem where the first letter of each line spells a word that fits with the theme of the poem or exposes a deeper meaning.
- *Limerick* – This is a 5-live witty poem with the first, second, and fifth lines rhyme as do the other two with each other.
- *Epic* – This type of poetry is a lengthy narrative poem celebrating adventures or accomplishments of heroes.
- *Couplet* – This can be a part of a poem or stand alone as a poem of two lines that rhyme.
- *Free verse* – This type of poem doesn't follow any rules and is free written poetry by the author.

The majority of poets, specifically less experienced ones, write what's called *free verse*, which is a poem without a form, or with a form the poet has made up for that specific piece.

A poet may decide to have a certain rhyme scheme or might make their poems syllabic.

With a free verse poem, you can set up any theme or pattern you wish, or have none at all.

The great thing about poetry is that you can even start with a specific poem form, and then choose to alter it in order to make it unique and your own.

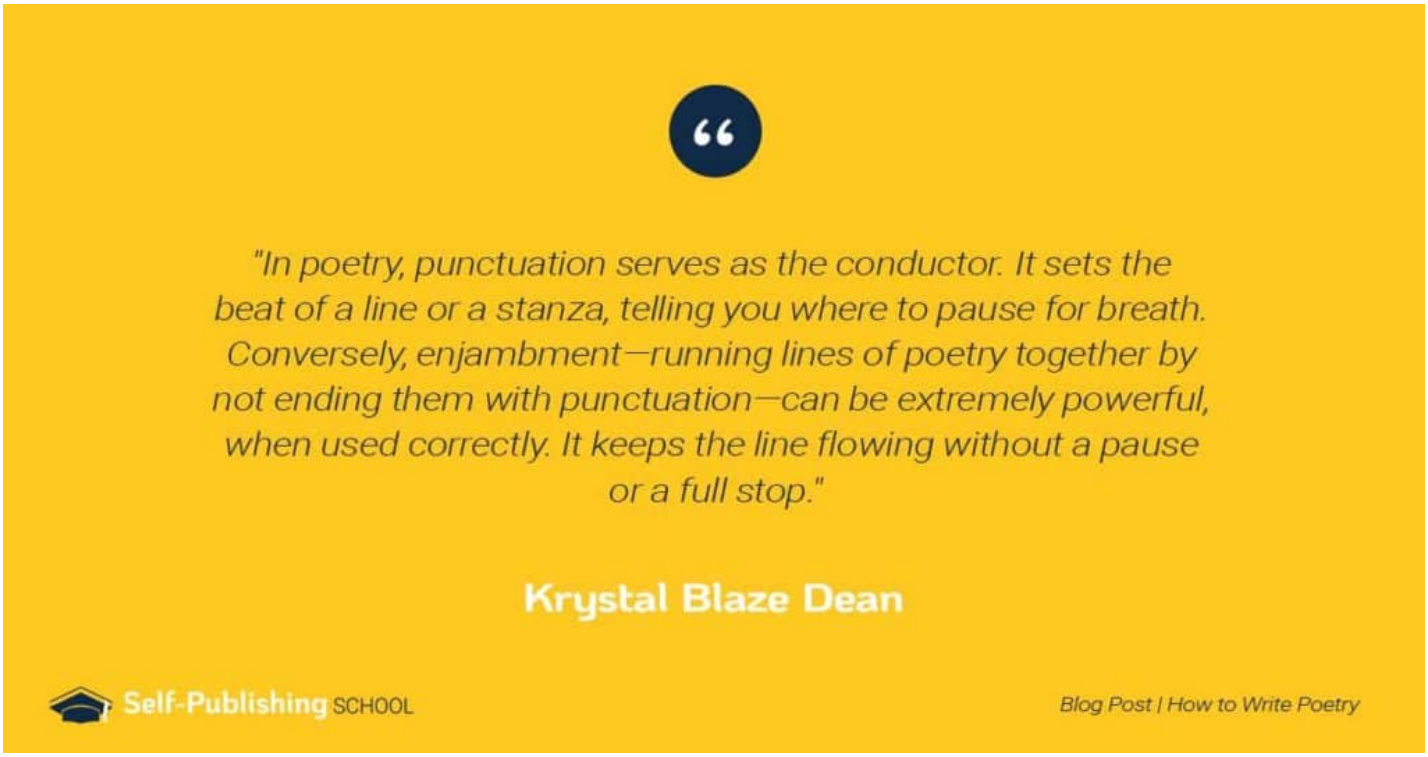
Poetry Punctuation

Writing a poem is difficult because you never know what the appropriate punctuation is, because it can be different from punctuation when writing a book.

There are essentially three ways to punctuate your poetry:

1. *Grammatically* – this means you use punctuation properly for every grammar rule; if you removed the lines and stanzas, it would work as a grammatically correct paragraph, and this even includes writing dialogue in your poem.
2. *Stylistically* – this means you use punctuation to serve the way you would like the poem to be read. A comma indicates a short pause, a period indicates a longer pause, a dash indicates a pause with a connection of thoughts. Using no punctuation at all would lend to a rushed feeling, which you may want. Your punctuation choices will depend on your goals when writing a poem.
3. *A combination.* Maybe you want to mostly follow punctuation rules, but you have a certain line you want read a certain way. It's totally fine to deviate from standard rules if it serves a purpose—you just need to do whatever you're doing intentionally. Know the rules before you can break them.

"In poetry, punctuation serves as the conductor. It sets the beat of a line or a stanza, telling you where to pause for breath. Conversely, ***enjambment****—running lines of poetry together by not ending them with punctuation—can be extremely powerful, when used correctly. It keeps the line flowing without a pause or a full stop."* – Krystal Blaze Dean



Last words of a poem

The last word of a line, the last word of your poem, and the last line of your poem are very important—these are the bits that echo in your reader's head and have the most emphasis.

Ending with punctuation (dash, period, comma) versus ending without punctuation will give you a dramatically different read, so consider the effect you'd like to have.

***Tip for last words*:** read the poem out loud a few times to see where you'd like the inflection and emphasis to fall.

#2 – Imagery

Imagery is a literary device that's a tangible description that appeals to one of the five senses.

The more imagery in a poem, the more the reader can connect with it.

***Tip for imagery*:** focus on details. Instead of going for the obvious description, really put yourself in that moment or feeling—what details are the most impactful and real?

Here are some examples of imagery:

- Pungent fumes lifted from the floor beneath her.
- Burning light painted the insides of his eyelids red.
- Hair from her ponytail bit at her face, swept into a frenzy by the furious winds.
- Crackling popped in rhythm to the dancing flames.

#3 – Sound

While imagery is for the mind, sound is for the ear. How do your words and lines sound when read out loud?

The most basic sound style is a rhyme, however, you should never force a rhyme!

If you try for exact rhymes on every line, it becomes "sing songy," and this is a big, red mark of an amateur. Sticking to a strict rhyme scheme can severely limit your word choice and creativity.

Instead of going for exact end rhymes, here are some options to achieve that appealing auditory effect of rhyming when writing poems:

1. *Assonance* – the repetition of a vowel sound in non-rhyming, stressed syllables. Assonance gives you the fun sound effect of a rhyme without sounding campy. An example of assonance is: "Hear the mellow wedding bells" by Edgar Allen Poe.
2. *Alliteration* – the repetition of a consonant at the beginning of words. Specifically hard consonant sounds like *T*, *ST*, and *CH* have a hard, staccato effect that a lot of poets like to use.
3. *Internal rhymes* – words *inside* of lines rhyme, rather than the end words. Like assonance, you get the effect of a rhyme without sound like a Dr. Seuss ripoff.

***Tip for sound in poetry*:** Focus on beautiful, crisp imagery to carry your poem, rather than strictly relying on the sound and structure of it.

#4 – Meaning

Structure, imagery, and sound work together to make up the technical excellence of a poem. But if your words are empty of a deeper meaning, what's the point in writing a poem at all?

*"Poetry is a form of storytelling. The key to writing is making the audience **feel**. Give them something to remember and hold onto."* – Brookes Washington

Many new writers latch onto clichés and tired topics (peep that alliteration) for their poems, because they think that's what they're *supposed* to do.

But emulating something someone else has done, or some *idea* of what you should think a poem should be about, isn't going to give you a genuine, emotional piece that other people can connect to.

So write the poem that ***only you can write.***

Tips for how to write a poem with meaning:

1. Brainstorm poetry topics by looking at your own experiences. What do you know? When is a time you felt very deeply about something? Can you put that feeling into words? Can you make that feeling an image other people can see through your words? That is the poem you write.
2. You don't need some grand, dramatic emotion to write about—think about the ordinary things that make us all human.

"Nothing ever ends poetically. It ends and we turn it into poetry. All that blood was never once beautiful. It was just red." – Kait Rokowski

#5 – Have a goal

Have a goal with writing a poem—what do you want your audience to feel?

Are you just writing for fun or for yourself? Poetry is often a very personal form of writing, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't think about your audience at the same time.

If you want to publish your poetry eventually, there are a few things to think about in terms of your goals.

What emotion or moral do you want to convey? What are you trying to express?

These are important questions to answer in order to write an impactful and memorable poem.

#6 – Avoid cliche phrases when writing poetry

There are many clichés you want to avoid when writing poetry.

Nothing really marks an amateur poet like clichés (and forced rhymes, like we mentioned before).

Despite the temptation, **avoid cliché phrases**. Go line by line and make your language as crisp and original as you can.

If there are pieces in your poem that seem like you've read or heard them before, try to reword it in order to make it more original.

#7 – Opt for minimalism

Err on the side of minimalism. Once you have a draft, cut it back to the bare, raw necessaries.

Every word should be heavy with emotion and meaning, and every word should be absolutely essential.

If your poem seems long-winded to *you*, imagine what that would be like for your reader. Be ready to edityour poem to get it down to its best form.

*"Poetry is just word math. **Every piece has mean something**, and there can't be any extraneous bits otherwise it gets confusing. It just becomes a puzzle made out of all the words that make you feel something."* – Abigail Giroir

#8 – Refine your poem

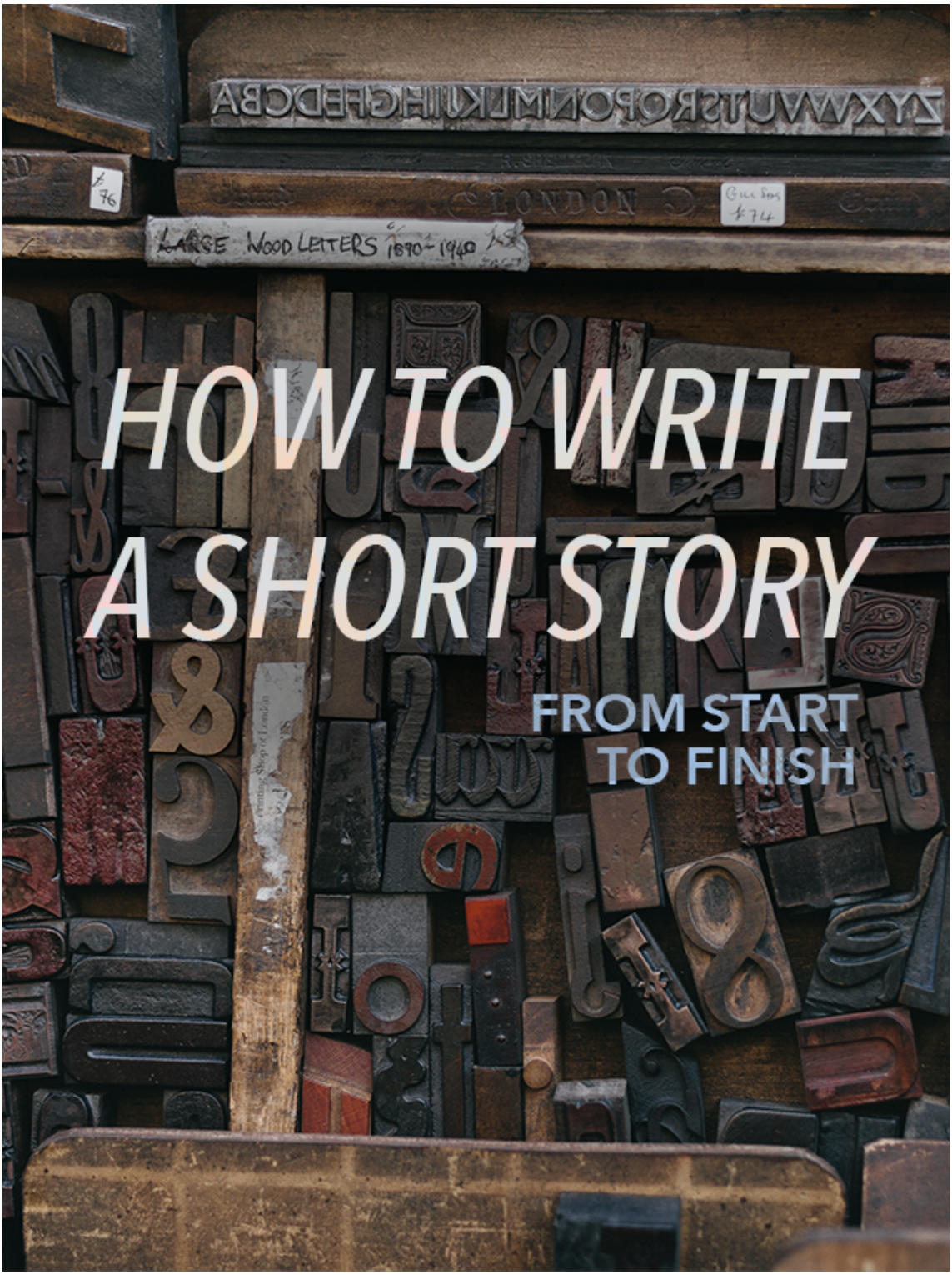
The real magic of poetry happens in the revising and refining.

Revise the ever-living heck out of it. To paraphrase an old professor of mine: *Don't be afraid to sit with it. For weeks, months, years—as long as the poem needs.*

How to Write a Short Story from Start to Finish

by Joe Bunting | 141 Comments

I'm working on a new short story. However, it's been a while, and I'm feeling out of practice, like I have to figure out how to write a short story all over again.



To some extent, the process for writing a story is different each time. In the introduction to *American Gods*, Neil Gaiman quotes Gene Wolfe, who told him, "You never learn how to write a novel. You only learn to write the novel you're on."

This is true for all creative writing, short stories included.

> You never learn how to write a short story. You only learn to write the story you're on.

Tweet this

And yet, there are certain patterns to writing a short story, patterns I think everyone follows in their own haphazard way. I'll call them steps, but this is less of a step-by-step process, and more like a general path that may or may not apply to your story. Still, it's these patterns that I want to present to you in hopes it will make your own short story writing easier.

At the same time, I've been presenting these rough steps to myself as I work on my short stories. Good news: It's coming along!

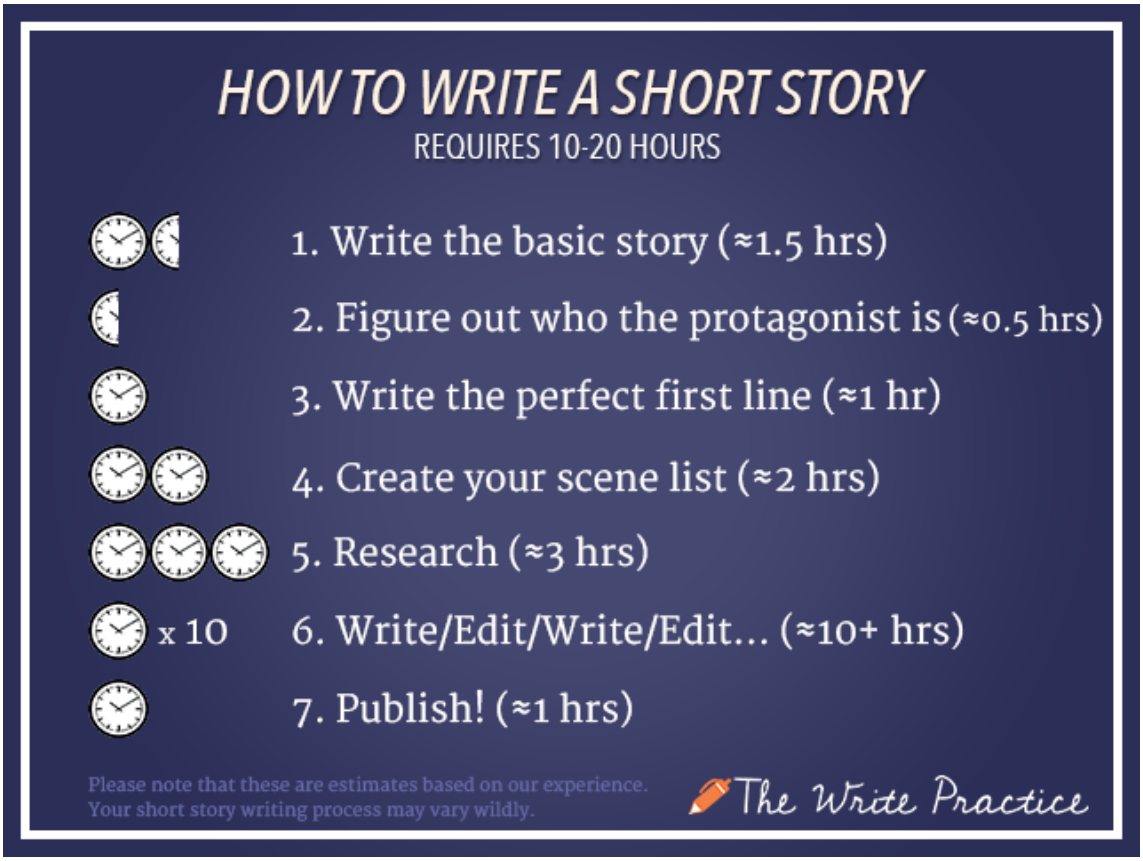
Requirements to Writing a Short Story

But before we begin, let's quickly discuss three things you'll need to write your short story. If you don't have these, you should think twice before you begin:

- **Approximately ten to twenty hours of time.** We all write at different paces, and depending on the length of your story (e.g. 100-word micro fiction or 200-word flash fiction vs. 5,000-word traditional short story) it might take five hours or fifty. But I've found that most short stories in the 3,000- to 5,000-word range take ten to twenty hours. Let me know how long yours take in the comments.
- **An idea.** This guide assumes you already have an idea for a story, even if it's just a basic sliver of an idea. If you're still looking for an idea though, check out our top 100 short story ideas. Don't like any of those? Try writing something from real life!
- **Writing devices or utensils.** Okay, it's obvious you need something to write with to finish a short story, but I needed a third point! (By the way, I recommend Scrivener for writing short stories. Here's my review.)

7 Steps to Write a Short Story

Ready to become a short story writer? Here are seven steps on how to write a great short story:



1. First, Write the Basic Story in One Sitting

Start writing. It may seem silly to begin a list of steps on how to write a short story with a tip to "write the story," but let me explain.

There are really two different kinds of stories. There is the art form, "short stories," which comes complete with characters, plot, description, and style.

Then there's the *story*, the funny, amusing, crazy story you'd tell a friend over a meal.

The story and the *short* story are not the same thing. The former is just a story, we tell them all the time. The latter is an art.

The first step to writing a short story is to write the former, the *story*, that version of the story that you would tell a friend.

And when you write it, be sure to write it in one sitting. Just tell the *story*. Don't think about it too much, don't go off to do more research, don't take a break. Just get the story written down. Whenever I break this rule it takes me FOREVER to finish writing the story.

2. Next, Find Your Protagonist

After you've written the basic story, take a step back. You may feel extremely proud of your story or completely embarrassed. Ignore these feelings, as they bear no relation to how good or bad your story actually is or, more importantly, how good it will be.

The next step is to read through your story to find the protagonist.

Now, you may think you already know who your protagonist is, but depending on your story, this can actually be more tricky than you might think.

Your protagonist isn't necessarily the narrator or main character (though they often are), nor is she necessarily the "good guy" in the story. Instead, the protagonist is the person who makes the decisions that drive the story forward.

Your protagonist centers the story, drives the plot, and his or her fate gives the story its meaning. As you move forward in the writing process, it's important to choose the right protagonist.

Learn more about how to create a protagonist in a story.

3. Then, Write the Perfect First Line

Great first lines have the power to entice your reader enough that it would be unthinkable to set your story down. If you want to hook your reader, it starts with writing the perfect first sentence.

We've written a full post about how to write the perfect first line, but here are five quick writing tips for great first lines:

- Like the opening of a film, grab your reader's attention by inviting them into the scene. Don't start with backstory.
- Surprise us.
- Establish a voice and point of view (first person or third person, typically).
- Be clear.
- See if you can tell the entirety of your story in a single sentence.

4. Break the Story Into a Scene List

Every story is composed of a set of scenes that take place in a specific place and time. A scene list keeps track of your scenes, helping you organize your story and add detail and life at each step.

Scene lists do two main things:

- Provides story structure
- Show you which parts need more work

You don't have to follow your scene list exactly, but they definitely help you work through your story, especially if you're writing over multiple sittings.

For more about how to create a scene list, check out our guide here.

5. Only Now Should You Research

If you're like me, you want to start researching as soon as you get an idea so that you can pack as much detail into the story as possible. The problem is that if you research too soon, what you find will distort your story, causing it to potentially break under the weight of what you've learned.

Other writers never research, which can leave their story feeling fuzzy and underdeveloped.

By waiting until your story is well on its way, you can keep it from getting derailed by the research process, and by this point you'll also be able to ask very specific questions about your story rather than following tangents wherever they take you.

So go fill in that scene list with some hard, cold facts!

6. Write/Edit/Write/Edit/Write/Edit

Now it's time to get some serious writing done.

You know who your protagonist is, have the perfect first line, have created your scene list, and have done your research, it's time to finally get this story to a first draft.

We all write differently. Some write fast in multiple drafts, others write slow and edit as they go. I'm not going to tell you how you should be writing. Whatever works for you, just get it done.

For a thorough process on **editing your story**, check out my guest post on Positive Writer. But here are some questions to consider when editing short fiction:

- Is your point of view consistent?

- Do you have all the elements of story structure?
- Is your story an appropriate length? (Stories with a word count over 10,000 words are getting into novella territory. Try to keep your story around the typical 5,000 words.)
- Do you have a satisfying ending?

7. Publish!

I firmly believe publishing is the most important step to becoming a writer. That's why I'll tell you that once your story is finally written, it's not *finished* until it's published.

Now, you don't necessarily need to get published by prestigious literary magazines to share your work. Instead, what if you got feedback from a writing friend or our Write Practice Pro community?

If you want your short story to be as good as it can be, get feedback—first from a small group of friends or other writers, and then from a larger community of readers.

The worst thing you can do for your story is to hide it away out of fear or even feigned indifference.

Now, go get your story out into the world.