



**Academic Support Center  
Writing Center**

**Plot Summary vs. Literary Analysis**

Resource: *website bucks.edu*

**Plot Summary**

A plot summary is a brief description of a story's plot. It does not contain discussion of any deeper meaning, opinions, or even extensive details about the work.

**Literary Analysis**

A literary analysis is where the student explores deeper meaning and examines the different elements of a piece of literature. The goal of a literary analysis is to broaden and deepen your understanding of a work.

Professors often provide discussion topics or ask questions in their assignment instructions to guide students on what literary elements need to be analyzed and discussed. You'll need to exercise your critical thinking.

**Examples of Literary Analysis Topics:**

- Poetry: analyze the different types of images present in the text, or analyze the relationship between the poem's form and content.
- Drama: analyze the relationship between main plot and sub plot, or analyze the character flaw of a tragic hero by tracing how it is revealed throughout the play.
- Story: analyzing a particular theme and show how the writer supports this theme through various literary elements in the story.
- Focusing on what the author accomplishes or fails to accomplish with the text.
- Focusing on elements that work together within a text that build towards the climax or conclusion.
- Explaining how or why a literary work does something.

**REMEMBER:** There are no right or wrong analytical ideas unless you know the author's original intent. The key to writing a literary analysis is how well you identify, develop, and support your ideas.

### **How to Write a Literary Analysis:**

**1. Begin with the development of an idea.** This idea can be about a specific part of the literary work, its author, writing style, genre, or elements such as theme, tone, plot, characterization, setting, etc.

**2. Centralize this idea by writing the thesis statement.** The thesis is the foundation for all of your supporting ideas. These ideas will form the body of the paper and will always go directly back to the thesis statement.

**3. Discuss and analyze each supporting idea at a time.** Ideally, *each* idea is discussed in one or two paragraphs.

**4. Find evidence *to support (not explain)* your ideas.** Evidence comes from the following examples from the original literary work:

- Direct quotations
- Summaries of scenes, events, etc. (*not* of the entire work)
- Paraphrases of long quotes

**5. Find and use secondary sources if the professor allows and/or requires them.** Secondary sources include the following:

- A book or article that discusses the text you are discussing.
- A book or article that discusses a theory related to your argument
- A book or article that discusses the social and historical context of the text

**6. Analyze *throughout your entire essay*.** Don't save the analysis for just the end of the essay or a paragraph.

**7. Draw your analytical conclusion in the closing paragraph.** Again, there is no right or wrong conclusion in your analysis. The key is to ensure your conclusion has been discussed and supported in the body of the paper as introduced by your thesis statement.