
Introduction to English Literature

A Comprehensive Guide to Literary Analysis and Academic Writing

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UOC teaching material



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Introduction

The main focus of *Introduction to English Literature* is on the textual analysis and critical interpretation of a variety of literary texts written in English, of diverse genres and historical periods. For many students, including perhaps yourself, reading, thinking and writing in English can be a demoralizing task, particularly when you are asked to go beyond surface-level reading and address issues such as tone, theme, style, characterisation, gender and genre concerns, historical context, etc. The failure to understand the distinction between plot-based assessment and literary analysis can lead to significant confusion and, not rarely, to a sense of disorientation and frustration. Apart from the comprehensible difficulty of the language itself, being asked to closely analyse a work of literature and extract a broader and deeper meaning presents various challenges that need to be addressed if you wish to successfully complete the course, pass the Continuous Assessment Tests (CATs), and enjoy the process in the meantime.

As CAT1 will focus on theoretical questions of definition (what literature is and what it means to study literature) driving towards enquiry into the “English literature-literatures in English” debate, this guide will specifically concentrate on the subject and content matter of the other assigned tasks (CAT2 to CAT5), which deal with more practical aspects of literary analysis. In other words, the following pages will provide you with a clear and motivating account of how to pursue the study of English literature so that you can become familiar with and confident about the general strategies and tools that are used for critical reading and argumentative writing. The guide’s main objectives are thus to contribute to increasing your critical reading and thinking, and to help you reflect these on your writing.

The guide consists of two modules, in addition to this introduction. The first module will focus on what literary analysis is and what it entails, providing you with some reading strategies to help you improve your critical reading techniques, as well as a brief glossary of some key literary terms required for effective analysis and comprehension of literature.

The second module will offer some general advice on academic writing, including tips on selecting the appropriate register, tone and audience and on how to use textual evidence through quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing. You will also be provided with specific instructions on how to express your opinion in a debate (CAT1), answer questions based on text commentary (CAT2 and CAT5), and write a critical essay (CAT3) and a critical commentary on a poem (CAT4).

Note

The debate will be based on a selection of quotations from academic essays and on the book “La literatura” available from the resources section in the classroom.

Ultimately, the tools of literary analysis and academic writing outlined here will be applicable to whatever texts you read. The more you read literature in English, the easier reading and writing in the target language will become, and this applies not only to your compulsory reading but to all your reading.

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Analysing Literature

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1. Critical Reading
2. Strategies for Critical Reading
3. Terms for Analysing Literature

Module 2

Writing about literature

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1. Getting started
2. Linguistic register, tone and audience
3. Using Textual Evidence in Writing Assignments

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