

Writing About Literature p. 2219

Reading and **writing** are closely related - even mutually dependent - activities. Our reading isn't truly complete until we have tried to capture our sense of the literature in writing so as to make it intelligible, persuasive, and meaningful to other people. We read literature more actively and attentively when we integrate informal writing into the reading process - pausing to mark important or confusing passages, to jot down significant facts, to describe the impressions and responses the text provokes.

- The process of writing requires re-reading and rethinking, testing our first impressions and initial hypotheses.
- By considering other readers' point of view and working to persuade them to accept alternative ways of interpreting a literary work, we ourselves learn new ways of seeing.
- Do not simply restate the facts, paraphrase or summarize when writing about literature.
- All essays about literature requires responsible and effective quotation and citation.
- **Paraphrase, summary, and description** are each specific ways of "simply restating the facts". Papers must make arguments about facts and their significance, using statements of fact like those that make up paraphrases, summaries and descriptions in order to substantiate and develop debatable claims about the literary text.

Paraphrase - To paraphrase a statement is to restate it in your own words. The goal of paraphrase is to represent a statement fully and faithfully; a paraphrase tends to be at least as long as the original.

How To Use It:

- Paraphrasing ensures and demonstrates that you understand what you have read. It can be helpful when authors' diction and syntax or their logic seems especially difficult, complex or "foreign" to you.
- Paraphrasing can direct your attention to nuances of tone or potentially significant details in any literary text
- By drawing your attention to details, paraphrasing can help you begin to generate the kind of interpretive questions an essay might explore.

Summary - a summary is a fairly succinct restatement or overview - in your own words - of the content of an entire literary text. A summary of a literary work is generally called a **plot summary** because it focuses on the **action** or **plot**. Summarizing entails selection and emphasis. As a result, any summary reflects a particular point of view and may even begin to imply a possible interpretation or argument. When writing a summary, you should try to be as objective as possible. Your summary will reflect a particular understanding and attitude, which is actually quite useful.

How To Use It:

- Summarizing a literary work may help you begin to figure out just what your particular point of view is or at least what aspects of the work strike you as most important and potentially worthy of analysis,

Description - Whereas both summary and paraphrase focus on content, a description of a literary text focuses more on its form, style or structure.

How to Use It:

- Responding actively to a text and preparing to write about it require paying close attention to form, style and structure as well as content. Describing a text or some aspect of it (its **imagery**, **rhyme**, **scheme**, or **meter**) is a useful way to make sure that you are paying that kind of attention, identifying the sort of details whose significance you might explore in an essay. Ask, “How do these details relate to each other?” How do they individually and collectively contribute to the text’s effect and meaning?”