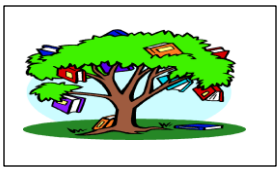

Toward Better Literacy: Reference Outlines

The Critical Essay

This type of essay, also known as an **evaluative** or **response** essay, is not necessarily meant to be "critical" in a negative sense, but simply to analyze a particular work in terms of its author's intentions, techniques, and style. Your claims about the work may range from an analysis of its structure to an evaluation of its merit.

Purpose: to analyze and possibly evaluate a particular work
Perspective: third-person (*he*, *she*, *it*, *one*, *they*...)
Organization: with each point leading logically into the next, in order of importance

Typical Structure:

1. **Introduction:**
    a. Attention-getter focusing the reader on the work to be analyzed?
    b. Necessary background information such as the work's title and author
    c. Short summary of the work?
    d. **Thesis**: a strong, arguable claim about the work being analyzed
2. **Body (each paragraph):**
    a. **Topic sentence**: one major point supporting the thesis
    b. Evidence for this point using *logos* (logic), *ethos* (authority), or *pathos* (emotion)
    c. Specific quotes from the work being analyzed?
    d. Transition to the next major point
3. **Conclusion:**
    a. Concise summary of the main claim and supporting evidence
    b. Overall significance of this analysis
    c. Suggestions for further reading?

Notes:

- Read your instructions *carefully*. You may be asked to answer a specific question or use specific criteria to evaluate the work.
- Consider your **audience**. For a **literary analysis**, you can generally assume that your readers have already read the work. If you are writing a **review**, however, be sure not to give away the ending!
- Identifying and describing the work's underlying **theme** (or central message) may
  be a major part of your analysis.
- You should also comment on the author's *style*:
    - **Tone**: the narrator's particular voice and attitude
    - **Diction** (word choice) and **syntax** (phrasing)
    - Use of **detail**, **imagery**, and **figurative language**