

Purpose for Using Secondary Sources in Research of a Literary Analysis

Why you consult secondary sources early in the writing process:

1. Lets you approach research with an **open mind**, so that you can form an opinion of the text after reading a range of opinions on the source
2. Reduces your likelihood to **distort** source information to **fit** your argument
3. Helps you realize that you do have an **opinion** on a text, an **opinion** that you may have not realized before – you will realize your **opinion** if you start to **disagree** with claims
4. Allows you to avoid simply **repeating** or **reporting** what others have said

4 Tasks of the Research Process

- identifying and locating potentially useful secondary sources
- evaluating the credibility of sources
- creating and maintaining a working bibliography
- taking notes

1. Identifying and locating potentially useful secondary sources:

- Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC) books in our library
- 19th Century Literary Criticism books in our library
- 20th Century Literary Criticism books in our library
- Gale Literary Reference Center database
- Some websites ending in .edu (get these approved by your instructor)

2. Evaluating the credibility of sources:

- How credible is the publisher (in the case of books), the periodical (in the case of essays, articles, and reviews), or the sponsoring organization (in the case of Internet sources)?
- How credible is the author? Is he or she a recognized expert in the relevant field or on the relevant subject?
- How credible is the actual argument?

3. Creating and maintaining a working bibliography

- it is a working **Works Cited** page that keeps track of all possible sources
- use **MLA** format
- list entries in **alphabetical** order
- indicate sources that you will use, because the information is pertinent to your paper and sources that you reject, because the information doesn't help you for your paper (put handwritten notes on sheet)

4. Taking notes:

- Read literary criticisms carefully, underlining and highlighting details that provide insight into the meaning of the text, insight might include information on:
 - **Characterization**
 - **Use of a literary device**
 - **Theme**
 - **Social critique**
- Paraphrase claims when you can change the **wording** of what the author says without changing the **meaning** of what they said

- Include a parenthetical citation – **author's name** and **page number** – when you are writing your notes
- Put similar notes together – if you type them up in Word, you can cut and paste your quotations and paraphrases, putting them under **headings** to keep your research organized
- See if you can write a **summary** (with bullet points or with your quotations/paraphrases) that goes over all of your source information, shows how all of the arguments fit together
 - Requires you to **understand** your source information
 - Requires you to define the main **questions** at issue in the conversation
 - Forces you to take indicate what **stance** each source takes on a question, where and how their **opinions differ**
 - Helps you see **gaps** in the conversation, places where you can enter and contribute

Developing a Thesis from Secondary Sources

After reading your primary source texts (your short stories or novels) – and your secondary source texts (your literary criticisms), you will look for similarities, differences, and gaps in analysis.

While reading your short stories or novels, ask:

- What are the themes? How are these themes depicted? Are there important events that contribute to the themes?
- What literary devices does the author use? How does the author use these literary elements? What do these literary devices show the reader? How do these literary devices impact the text and its themes?
- What do specific events, characters, or interactions reveal about our society? How do characters

While reading literary criticisms, ask the following questions:

- What is the **conversation** about?
- How can I **contribute** to the conversation?

More specifically, ask:

1. Do the critics tend to **disagree** about a particular issue? Might I take one side or another in this debate? Might I offer an **alternative**?
2. Do any critics make a claim that I think deserves to be **challenged** or **clarified**?
3. Do the critics **ignore** a particular element or aspect of the text that I think needs to be investigated? Do any of the critics make a claim that they don't really **develop**? Or do they make a claim about one text that I might apply to another?

While reading historical or biographical sources, ask:

- Is there information here that might help readers **understand** some aspect of the literary work in a new way?
- Does any of this information **challenge** or **complicate** my previous interpretation of the text, or an interpretation that I think other readers might adopt if they **weren't aware** of these facts?

How to Use Literary Criticism When Writing

Ways to use literary criticism in your paper:

1. Suggest that there is a **problem** or **puzzle** worth investigating by showing that sources offer different opinions about a particular issue

Example: [A]lmost all interpreters of [*Antigone*] have agreed that the play shows Creon to be morally defective, though they might not agree about the particular nature of his defect. [examples]...I want to suggest [instead] that...

—Martha Nussbaum, "*The Fragility of Goodness . . .*" (ch. 31)

2. Challenge or clarify a **faulty** source claim

Example: Modern critics who do not share Sophocles' conviction about the paramount duty of burying the dead and who attach more importance than he did to the claims of political authority have tended to underestimate the way in which he justifies Antigone against Creon. [examples]

—Maurice Bowra, "*Sophoclean Tragedy*" (ch. 31)

3. Develop or apply a claim if a source neglects a significant aspect or element of the text

Example: At first sight, there appears little need for further study of the lovers in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and even less of their environment. To cite but a few critics, David Cecil has considered the courtship of Bathsheba, Virginia Hyman her moral development through her varied experience in love, George Wing her suitors, Douglas Brown her relation to the natural environment, Merryn Williams that of Gabriel Oak in contrast to Sergeant Troy's alienation from nature, and, most recently, Peter Casagrande Bathsheba's reformation through her communion with both Gabriel and the environment. To my knowledge, none has considered the modes or styles in which those and other characters express love and how far these may result from or determine their attitude to the land and its dependents, nor the tragic import in the Wessex novels of incompatibility in this sense between human beings, as distinct from that between the human psyche and the cosmos.

—Lionel Adey, "Styles of Love in *Far from the Madding Crowd*."
Thomas Hardy Annual 5 (1987): 47–62. Print.