



### What is Literary Criticism?

“Literary criticism” refers to studies devoted to the comparison, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of works of literature. Here is a list of a few “schools of literary criticism.” Thinking about these “schools” may help you decide which direction your personal research might take as you write your literary research paper.

### Schools of Literary Criticism

Biographical Criticism	Assumes that by examining the facts and motives of an author’s life, the meaning and intent of his/her literary work can be illuminated.
Comparative Criticism	Finds parallels between different literary works.
Ethical Criticism	Applies principles of morality to an author’s works. The moralistic school of criticism began with Plato.
Expressive Criticism	Treats a literary work as a product of the author’s imagination and judges a work by its sincerity.
Historical Criticism	Assumes the relationship between art and society is organic, views a literary work in relation to the standards and social milieu of the period in which it was produced.
Impressionistic or Aesthetic Criticism	Expresses the special qualities of a specific work and the responses it evokes in the critic.
Mimetic Criticism	Views a literary work as an imitation or reflection of the world and human life; applies the criterion of “truth” to the subject matter which the work represents.
Pragmatic Criticism	Views a literary work as something that is constructed for the purpose of producing certain effects on its audience, and judges the work according to its success in achieving that aim.
Psychological (Psychoanalytic) Criticism	Analyzes a literary work in terms of the subconscious creative process of the author, interprets a work’s structure and characters psychoanalytically.
Social or Political Criticism	Evaluates a literary work in relation to a specific social movement, theory, or group – for example: <i>gay and lesbian</i> criticism or <i>Marxist</i> criticism.
Textual Criticism	Seeks to establish the proper text for study of a literary work.
Theoretical Criticism	Analyzes a literary work according to a set of general principles.
Feminist Criticism	Questions gender stereotyping has a ‘women-centered’ approach, looks at patriarchal structures and how they affect women as well as deals with issues of womanhood.
Cultural Criticism	Discusses and analyzes questions of race, ethnicity, or culture in the literary work.

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