

# Literature Based Research Tutorial

Literary based research requires additional knowledge and understanding beyond that provided in the LRC's general "Research Process" tutorial (See <http://www.cccti.edu/LRC/tutorial/ResearchTitle.htm>.) Accordingly, while enrolled in your English classes, complete the following tutorial prior to initiating literary analysis research.

## Overview

Any scholar undertaking a literary based research project must 1) gain an understanding of the general expectations required for literary analysis (to include an understanding of literary elements); and 2) ponder the personal impact of the title. To acquire a grasp of these concepts, read the following explanations:

<http://www.brocku.ca/english/jlye/criticalreading.html>

<http://www.brocku.ca/english/jlye/meaning.html>

<http://www.rsc.c.tn.us/owl&writingcenter/OWL/ElementsLit.html>

<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/resources/literary.html>

Note: As you learn to read critically, you will automatically consider choosing titles which lend themselves to a "critical eye," i.e. classic titles/authors and/or quality contemporary literature.

Second, read the titles you have selected, whether long fiction, short stories or poems, with an "open-mind." Think about the elements or "parts" of the title and how they relate or contribute to the whole of the story. Ask questions of yourself, such as: Which part of the story piqued my curiosity? What was "new" about the story? What was the most important part of the story? During which part of the story was I "moved?"

As you briefly skim back through the title before advancing to the next stage of your project, write down some "keywords" associated with the title's literary elements (characters, plot, theme) and climatic moments.

## Topic/Thesis Formation



Perhaps one of the greatest differences between literary based research and general academic research lies within the second stage of the process. In general academic research, of course, an outline is prepared based upon the readings considered in the overview stage. However, within literary based research, a "working" thesis must be developed.

A thesis is an intellectual proposal or argument supported by scholarly sources, such as journal articles and/or published works of literary criticism. A well-developed literary thesis simply brings the meaning of the literary work "to the surface," for the purpose of contemplation. Your reader may agree or disagree with your argument or proposal, but is less hesitant to do so if your argument is based upon sound and thorough research.

Additionally, in contrast to a general academic paper, when preparing a literary analysis, the critical questioning and synthesis work is required at this early stage rather than later stages. The researcher must look for recurring patterns/themes within the literary work and/or compare and contrast the title's literary elements before the initiation of information gathering. Center critical questioning around the

areas of the literary work which impart a personal emotional impact, (as discussed in the overview stage above).

Such questioning might include:

- *How do the characters in this title compare with other famous literary characters?*
- *What are the contrasts in personality among the characters?*
- *How does the setting define the characters?*
- *How does the plot compare with stories/poems of the same genre?*
- *Do the voices of the story (point of view) echo other major literary characters?*
- *How does the theme of the story/poem compare with themes from titles of the same genre or historical period?*

For example, if I chose Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as a title for literary evaluation and analysis, Twain's use of humor may have piqued my curiosity. I therefore propose several questions prior to the formation of my thesis, such as:

*How does Twain's use of humor in Huckleberry Finn advance the plot structure?*

*How does Twain's use of humor in Huckleberry Finn contribute to an understanding of the book's major themes?*

As I personally answer my own questions, I begin to formulate a "working" thesis, such as:

Mark Twain's use of humor within The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn contributes to an understanding of the title's major theme regarding the immortality of slavery. \*\*

\*\* Prior to the completion of gathering information, a thesis must always be a "working" thesis, as supporting documentation may not serve to "prove" or support your stance. For this reason, you may wish to formulate two or three "working" thesis statements before beginning your research, in the event you must "change course," or modify your topic/thesis.

Learn more about literary patterns and the development of a thesis statement at:

<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~smarx/courses/Paradigm.html>

<http://www.gpc.edu/~lawowl/handouts/patterns.pdf>

<http://www.longwood.edu/staff/burgesjb/101docs/litthesis.html>

## Resources and Search Strategies

A thorough explanation of the literary resources available from the Broyhill Learning Resource Center, as well as search strategies associated with these resources, follows.

### 1. BOOKS AND AUDIOVISUAL MATERIAL

As shown in the above given picture, the LRC collection holds a series entitled "Literary Companion." This series contains readings (literary criticism and analysis) on major authors and their works (hence the titles begin with "Readings on..."). Significant literary titles, such as The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, many times constitute a "Readings on..." volume of their own. To access a listing of the 130 titles contained in this series, complete a title search, utilizing "Readings on" as the keyword.





Additionally, the LRC holds a significant number of readers' guides and readers' companions. Titles regarding specific genres and author biographies may serve as a means of finding bibliographic references to critical works as well.

Finally, don't forget that you may view audiovisual material in the Learning Resource Center. An example of an audiovisual resource which might prove helpful for a literary analysis follows:

Title	The adventures of Huckleberry Finn : understanding a classic
Alternate Title	The adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Publisher Info.	Princeton, NJ : Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1998
Phys. Descr.	1 videocassette (34 min.) : sd., col. ; 1/2 in
Notes	In this program, three scholars examine the work and its various themes - race, cruelty, consequences of greed, meaning of civilization, and the nature of freedom
Subjects	<u>Twain, Mark - 1835-1910 - Criticism and interpretation</u>
Call No	av *VC 4498



To access these materials, using the LRC's computer catalog, , complete a subject search by the author's name, utilizing the Browse feature to search for critical material. For example:




### Caldwell Community College Library

## Basic Search

Search For:

Search Index:  Keyword  Author  Title  Subject  Series

Search Options:



### Caldwell Community College Library

## Subject Browse

From : Twain Mark 1835 1910  
To : Twenty first century Forecasting

Select the term you want to search and press Enter.

Subject	# of Titles
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910</a>	13
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910 Bibliography</a>	1
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910 Biography</a>	7
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910 Childhood and youth</a>	1
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910 Criticism and interpretation</a>	16
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910 Dictionaries</a>	1
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910 Homes and haunts Missouri Hannibal</a>	1
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910 Journeys</a>	1
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910 Political and social views</a>	1
<a href="#">Twain Mark 1835 1910 Quotations</a>	1
<a href="#">Twelfth century</a>	2

This search strategy will categorize all titles which link to Mark Twain, his life and/or his work. In most instances, you will note a Criticism & Interpretation sub-category. Click on this choice to view works of literary criticism for the subject author.

## 2. REFERENCE MATERIAL

The LRC holds a significant number of reference volumes providing access to literary criticism and analysis. You will find "ref" placed before the call numbers for these volumes when searching in the computer catalog.

To simplify your search, however, the LRC recommends an initial search of the following volumes:

PUBLISHER: GALE GROUP

Poetry Criticism – indexed by author and title

Contemporary Literary Criticism – indexed by author, nationality and topic with an adjunct cumulative title index

EDITOR: MAGILL

MasterPlots for Poetry, Fiction, Drama, Short Stories, & Women's Literature: This series provides a description of the title's plot, a critical evaluation and a bibliography. It is indexed by author, title, geographic location and time period.

**NOTE:** [The Watauga LRC holds MasterPlots on CD-ROM.](#)

Literary Annual: Essay Reviews of 200-400 outstanding books published in the US during the year in question. Indexed by title, author, category and biographical works.

Critical Survey of....(Short Fiction, Contemporary Fiction, World Literature & Modern Fantasy Literature): Indexed by author.

Other resources of interest include:

Literature & Its Times: Profiles of Notable Literary Works & the Historical Events That Influenced Them

Contemporary Authors

Individual author reference works, such as: [Mark Twain A to Z: The Essential Reference to his Life & Writings](#)

When searching by author's name in these indexes, please do not forget that many authors publish under pseudonyms (EX: Mark Twain for Samuel Clemens).

### 3. NCLIVE

Begin your search within NCLIVE by accessing the tab Browse Resources and selecting Literary. Thereafter, the LRC suggests that you utilize the following databases in the given order for your search.

DATABASE	USAGE
1. Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers	If your search involves a well-known contemporary author, such as Tony Hillerman or Tom Clancy, utilize this resource to obtain critical bibliographies and literary element summaries.
2. Literature in Context	If you are lucky enough to have chosen one of the major titles featured in this source, critical articles and bibliographies are at your fingertips.

3. Scribner's Writers Series	Look up your author in this source to receive both a biography and a critical bibliography.
4. Academic Search Elite (Note: This database is accessed under the "alphabetical" tab).	Within this database you may limit your search to scholarly journals only.
5. American Humanities Index	A source rife with literary criticism sources.
6. NetLibrary	This source allows access to e-books. A search by author's name will reveal both works <u>by</u> and works <u>about</u> the author and his/her works. Shift through your selections carefully to find any literary based critical works.

Additional search tips include:

1. Begin your search within Academic Search Elite or American Humanities Index with a Boolean search (the use of and/or) associated with your thesis. For example: Mark Twain and humor. Search for full-text articles.
2. Don't forget to complete a search solely on the title of the work for more specific analyses.
3. If you receive very few or no links, expand your search by clicking "automatically and" and "search for related words." This expansion would search for "Mark Twain and humor" as well as "Mark Twain and joviality."
4. Type in the names of journal articles found in the annotated bibliographies of print reference material and/or the NCLIVE reference sources mentioned hereinabove (Critical Companions, Literature in Context, Scribner's). Hopefully, you will retrieve full text copies of such articles.

#### 4. WORLD WIDE WEB

Considered the "best of the best" for "free" literary analysis on the World Wide Web is the humanities index Voice of the Shuttle. Access this source at: <http://vos.ucsb.edu/>.

Within this source, scroll down to the Literature Section. On the right of the screen, an "On This Page" sidebar will appear, listing several categories of literature. Select the category applicable to your title, type the author's name or the title of the work into the search bar and choose "criticism."

Other helpful indexes include:

<http://www.ipl.org/div/litcrit/> (search by author, period or title)

<http://www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Lit/>

Guides to additional and specific sources (such as British or Shakespearian criticism) may be found at:

<http://www.cccti.edu/LRC/Resources/SubLiterary.htm>

<http://www.ipl.org.ar/ref/litcrit/guide.html>

### Evaluate, Record, Write

In literary based research, a reliance on scholarly work is of the highest import. To grasp the concept of "scholarly vs. popular" read the following explanation:

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill20.html>

As you begin taking notes from your resources, review:

<http://www.cccti.edu/LRC/infolit/Record.htm>

Information and guides relating to the writing of your analysis may be found at:

<http://lrc.sierra.cc.ca.us/writingcenter/litanalysis.htm>

<http://www.gpc.edu/~lawowl/handouts/critical-writing.pdf>

<http://www.valpo.edu/home/faculty/bflak/e200fall98/analysis.html>

<http://vc.ws.edu/engl2120/litanalysis3.htm>