

In this lesson, you've thought about informational non-fiction, focusing on essays that present exposition and argument. In the next lesson, you'll be dealing with a particular form of informational non-fiction—the critical essay.

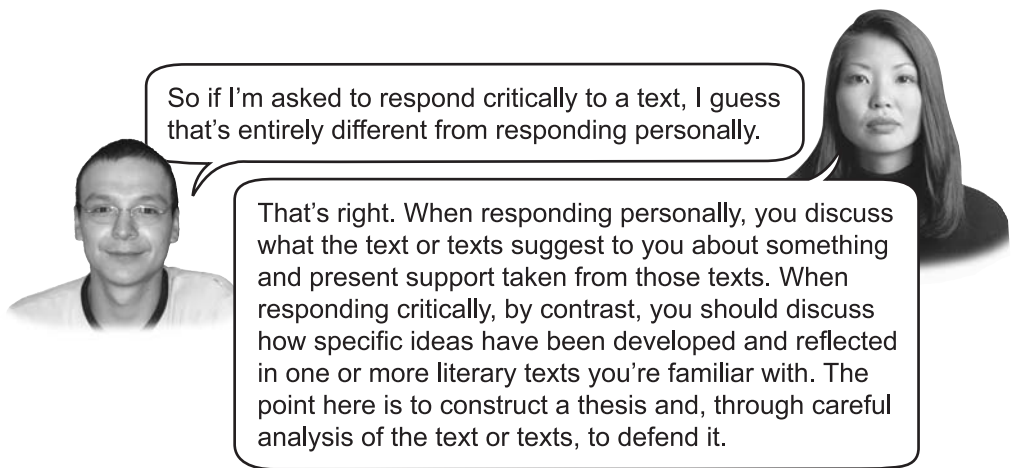
Now open Assignment Booklet 3B, turn to the Section 3 Assignment, and respond to question 1.

Lesson 32: The Critical Essay—A First Look

One type of informational non-fiction composition that you'll be working on throughout this course is the critical essay—or, as it's sometimes called, the analytical essay. A critical essay is a special variety of the essay of argument; as you'll recall, this sort of writing offers an analysis of one or more aspects of a text—most often a literary text—and an evaluation of the work's impact.

As an essay of argument, a critical essay falls more toward the formal, expository end of the scale than did the more personal essays that you focused on in Section 1. You'll be asked to write a critical response to a literary text in at least one of the tests you'll be taking at the end of this course, so it's something you'll be practising in future modules. All you're going to get now is a brief introduction and your first bit of practice.





Of course, you won't always be asked specifically to respond "personally" or "critically"; you'll have to be able to interpret what the instructions are asking you to do. Here, by way of example, is a question asking for a critical response, along with some hints for planning and writing.

Write a composition based on literature that you have studied in which the author examines the effect of adversity on the human spirit. What idea(s) does the author develop regarding the effect of adversity on the human spirit? Develop your composition by providing specific supporting details from the literature that you have chosen.

Reminders for planning and writing

- When considering the works you will discuss, choose texts that you know well, that are meaningful to you, and that are relevant to this assignment from those you have studied in your high school English language arts classes.
- Carefully consider your controlling idea or how you will create a strong unifying effect in your composition.
- You may choose to discuss more than one text.
- As you develop your ideas, support them by referring to appropriate, relevant, and meaningful literary texts.

1. Rewrite these instructions in your own words. Try not to leave out any important component.

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 3: Lesson 32 on page 170.

Note that nowhere does this question use the words *critical response* or *critical essay*. However, you'll note that it focuses entirely on an idea—the effect of adversity on the human spirit—and how this idea is developed in one or more literary texts. Nowhere are you asked for what the texts say to you or how you personally respond to them.

Writing Folder Suggestion 3H

What feelings do you experience when confronted with a formal composition question? What do you consider your strengths and weaknesses to be when responding to this sort of question?

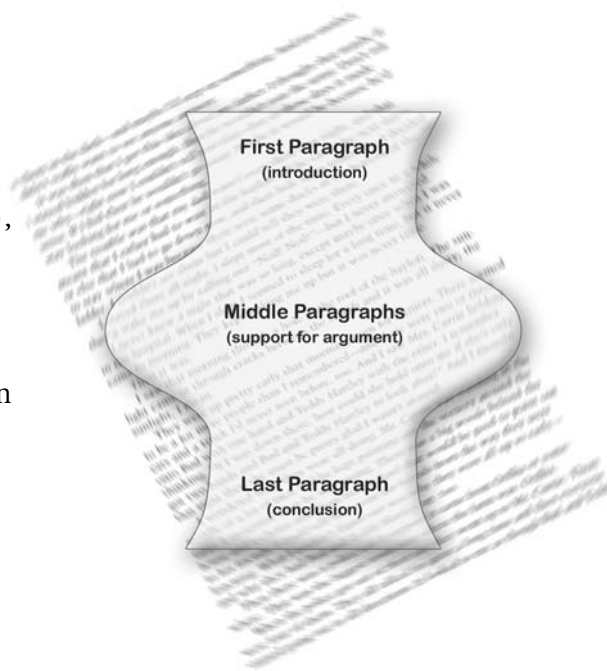
Note that the question you've been given asks you to do three things. You must

- select literature that's appropriate to the topic
- develop a thesis (or controlling idea) in which you present your views on what this literature has to say about the topic
- provide specific details from the literature you've chosen to support your thesis

When approaching a critical-response (or critical-essay) question of this sort, here are a few points to remember:

- Sometimes you'll be directed to discuss something about a specific text, but if given a choice of texts to select, choose two at the very most. One is even better. It's much better to go into depth with one work than to treat three or four superficially.
- Try not to lose your own, natural voice, but don't become too informal either. When it comes to this sort of assignment, if you're going to err, err on the side of formality. Avoid contractions and the pronouns *I* and *me*. These days, teachers and markers tend not to place as much weight on issues like these as they used to, but why take the chance?
- You aren't restricted to the traditional vase-shaped essay (a three-or-four paragraph body sandwiched between a one-paragraph introduction and a one-paragraph conclusion), but this format still works if you're comfortable with it.

This traditional arrangement allows you to present and explain one main point per paragraph, each one directly related to your controlling idea.



- Make sure you come up with a controlling idea, or thesis, and present it in your introduction. The body of the composition is where you'll defend your thesis.
 - Do have a conclusion of some sort that rounds things off. The ideas presented earlier in this module for effective introductions and conclusions apply to the most part to this sort of writing, but, as always, don't become too personal and never flippant.
 - Stay focused on the text or texts you're discussing—not your personal reaction to them. Use details from the texts to defend or illustrate any points you make.
2. a. Look again at the example critical-response question presented earlier in this lesson. Of the literary texts you've studied so far in this course, select **two or three** that you think lend themselves to the topic with which you've been presented.
 - b. If you were going to respond to this question, which literature from this course would you discuss? Give your reasons.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Lesson 32 on page 171.

Once you've decided on one or two works of literature to discuss (assuming, of course, that your assignment doesn't stipulate the texts), the next thing to do is to come up with a thesis or controlling idea. Your thesis, you'll remember, is the central point you want to make in your essay. A thesis shouldn't just make an obvious point; it's something you want to argue.

To say, for instance, that in "The Dead Child" Gabrielle Roy shows that adversity can be a hard thing to bear, you haven't come up with a very interesting or workable thesis. By contrast, to say that in this story Gabrielle Roy shows that being a witness to the grief of total strangers can sear itself into a person's memory, thereby changing that person for life, you've made an interesting observation—and one that needs some backing up with reference to the story itself.

3. You'll be doing more work in the next module on developing insightful and defensible theses, but now is the time to have your first go at it. Using the literary text you selected in question 2.b., try to formulate a thesis statement that you could argue in a critical essay.

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 3: Lesson 32 on page 171.



Like any piece of writing, a critical essay should have an effective introduction. The introduction to a work of this sort should identify the text(s) and author(s) that you'll be discussing as well as your thesis statement—the central point you'll be making. As you know, an introduction should also draw readers in and make them want to read on. This means that while a critical essay leans toward the formal side of the scale, the introduction should still sound lively.

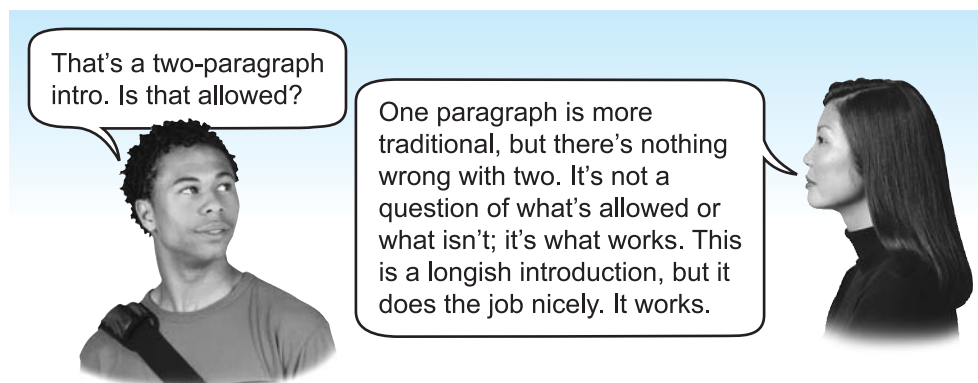


It's never a good idea to memorize a template for an introduction and then plug in the relevant information, but sometimes a model helps get an idea across. What follows is one person's introduction to a critical essay—actually, to a critical-response question on an exam. The topic was the ideas an author developed about the human imagination. Note how it leads up to the thesis rather than just presenting it out of nowhere.

This writer selected a text you're likely not familiar with, but that shouldn't affect your appreciation of the introduction itself.

During childhood, a healthy imagination can be a wonderful thing, offering a positive, hopeful, and exciting vision of the world and its possibilities. This is especially true for someone growing up in circumstances that might realistically be called hostile and repressive. As a person ages, however, it becomes increasingly important to see through the fantasies of childhood and accept the reality of life for what it is. At some point in everyone's life, a time comes to exchange childish dreams for the honest insight of sensible adulthood.

Canadian writer Margaret Laurence, in her short story "Horses of the Night," shows her readers that while a vivid imagination can be a powerful force for good in a person's early years, there comes a time when it is absolutely necessary to tone down one's dreams and make sure that they're in keeping with reality. This must be done if a person is ever going to confront that reality and—hopefully—develop into a capable, effective adult. In her story, Laurence uses character development and conflict to illustrate the truth of this observation.



4. Identify the thesis statement in this introduction.

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 3: Lesson 32 on page 171.



5. Take the time now to create a possible introduction to the essay for which you created a thesis statement in question 3. If it would help, review Section 4: Lesson 3 of Module 1 and see the *English Language Arts Handbook for Secondary Students*, pages 126 and 127.

For helpful ideas, see the Appendix, Section 3: Lesson 32 on page 171.

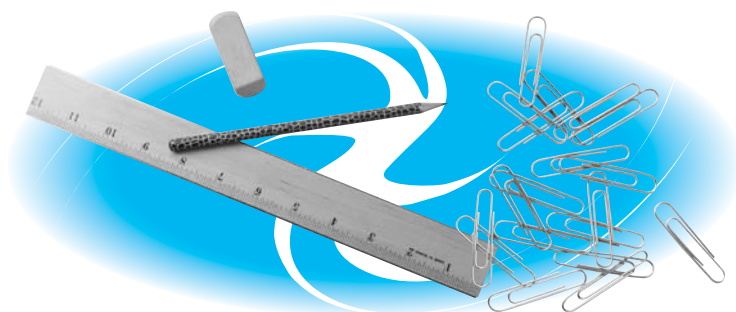
Did you notice that the last sentence of this introduction leads into the principal evidence the writer will use to defend his (or her) thesis. This writer will look at character development and conflict in the text being discussed. This neat transitional device leads nicely into the body of the critical essay.

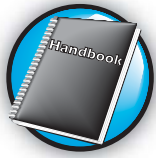
The body of a critical essay should defend the thesis by referring to specifics from the text(s) at issue. If you were discussing a short story or novel, for instance, you might look at elements like

- character development
- conflict
- the order of the plot (for example, chronological order and flashbacks)
- narrative point of view
- theme
- the writer's diction and style
- the mood of the work and the writer's tone

By contrast, if you were critiquing a poem, you'd probably talk about such things as

- the type of poem
- figurative language
- rhythm and sound devices
- sentence and line structure
- the mood of the poem and the writer's tone
- the speaker and point of view
- theme





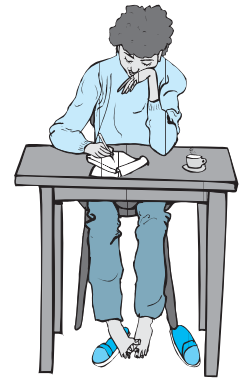
6. Now for the big job. Take some time and develop an outline for the body of a critical essay of three or four paragraphs. Work with the essay you've been thinking about in the preceding questions. If you're hazy on outlining, review pages 99 to 103 in the *English Language Arts Handbook for Secondary Students*. Your outline should be a sentence outline—like the one shown on page 103 of the handbook. Note that each paragraph has a topic sentence, followed by elaboration and evidence. Your evidence should come from the story you're discussing.

For helpful ideas, see the Appendix, Section 3: Lesson 32 on page 172.

The last thing to do in constructing a critical essay—as with any composition—is to create a conclusion that rounds things off neatly and leaves readers with that sense of finality.

It's a good idea to refer to your thesis again—though try not to do this too mechanically. Stay away from dry, formulaic expressions like "In this essay, it has been shown that"

Here's the conclusion to that essay on "Horses of the Night."



What Margaret Laurence shows so clearly is that the transition from an innocent, carefree childhood to the recognition and acceptance of adult reality can be a painful one—but one that must be successfully completed. In "Horses of the Night," she reveals to her readers that while a healthy imagination is a wonderful gift, it must never be allowed to come between a person and the real world in which that person lives. There comes a time when childhood dreams must take second place to adult truths.



7. Now, once again, it's your turn. Create a conclusion for the critical essay you've been planning. If you're feeling uncertain about structuring conclusions, review Module 1 and take a look at pages 128 and 129 in the *English Language Arts Handbook for Secondary Students*.

For helpful ideas, see the Appendix, Section 3: Lesson 32 on page 172.

Because the ability to write a critical response to a literary text is such an important one, you're going to be working on your skills in this area as you work through the remaining modules of ELA 30-1. As you do this, you'll be given more instruction as well as more practice.

You won't be asked to write an actual critical essay for this module; that will come in Module 4. You will, however, be handing in some of the work you've done in this lesson as part of your Section 3 Assignment.

When you write your ELA 30-1 Diploma Exam, you'll be asked to respond critically to one or more literary texts from this course. What follows is a marking guide much like the one on which your response will be graded. Though you won't be using it in this module, it's presented here so you can get an idea of what the markers will be looking for. You'll be using this guide in several future modules, beginning with Module 4; it would be a good idea to start becoming familiar with it now.

	Thought and Understanding	Supporting Evidence	Form and Structure	Matters of Choice	Matters of Correctness
Excellent 5	Ideas are insightful, demonstrating a comprehension of subtle distinctions in the literary text(s) and the topic. Literary interpretations are perceptive and illuminating.	Support is explicit, precise, and chosen to reinforce the student's ideas in a deliberate and judicious way. A strong connection to the student's ideas is maintained.	An effective arrangement of ideas and/or details contributes to a fluent, controlled, and shaped discussion that concludes skillfully. The unifying effect and/or controlling idea is integrated, successfully sustained, and coherently presented.	Diction is precise and effective. Syntactical structures are effective and sometimes polished. Stylistic choices contribute to a confident composition with a convincing voice.	This writing demonstrates confidence in control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. The relative absence of error is impressive considering the complexity of the response and the circumstances.
Proficient 4	Ideas are thoughtful, demonstrating a well-considered comprehension of the literary text(s) and the topic. Literary interpretations are revealing and convincing.	Support is relevant, accurate, and occasionally deliberately chosen to reinforce the student's ideas in a logical and clear way. A clear connection to the student's ideas is maintained.	A considered arrangement of ideas and/or details contributes to a competent, controlled discussion that concludes appropriately. The unifying effect and/or controlling idea is sustained and coherently presented.	Diction is specific. Syntactical structures are generally effective. Stylistic choices contribute to a competent composition with a capable voice.	This writing demonstrates competence in control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. Minor errors in complex language structures are understandable considering the circumstances.
Satisfactory 3	Ideas are relevant and straightforward, demonstrating a generalized comprehension of the literary text(s) and topic. Literary interpretations are general but plausible.	Support is adequate and general but occasionally lacking in consistency and persuasiveness. A straightforward connection to the student's ideas is maintained.	A straightforward arrangement of ideas and/or details provides direction for a discussion that concludes functionally. The unifying effect and/or controlling idea is presented and maintained generally; however, coherence may falter.	Diction is adequate but may be lacking in specificity. Syntactical structures are generally clear but attempts at complex structures may be awkward. Stylistic choices contribute to a clear composition with a matter-of-fact voice.	This writing demonstrates control of the basics of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. There may be occasional lapses in control and minor errors. However, the communication remains clear.
Limited 2	Ideas are superficial and oversimplified, demonstrating a weak comprehension of the literary text(s) and the topic. Literary interpretations are incomplete and/or literal.	Support is often inappropriate or is a restatement of what was taught or read, and/or it may be repetitive, contradictory, and/or lacking. The connection to the student's ideas is vague and/or redundant.	A discernible but ineffectual arrangement of ideas and/or details provides some direction for a discussion that does not conclude deliberately. A unifying effect and/or controlling idea is not maintained.	Diction is imprecise and/or inappropriate. Syntax is frequently awkward and/or immature. The writing may be vague, redundant, and/or unclear. Inadequate language choices contribute to a composition with an undiscerning or uncritical voice.	This writing demonstrates faltering control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. The range of errors blurs the clarity of communication.
Poor 1	Ideas are largely absent, are irrelevant, and/or do not develop the topic. Little comprehension of the literary text(s) and/or the topic is demonstrated.	Support is irrelevant, overgeneralized, and/or lacking. The support, if present, is largely unrelated to the student's attempted discussion.	A haphazard arrangement of ideas and/or details provides little or no direction for the discussion, and a conclusion is absent or obscure. A unifying effect and/or controlling idea is absent.	Diction is overgeneralized and/or inaccurate. Syntax is confused and uncontrolled. The writing is unclear. Lack of language choices contributes to a confusing composition with an ineffective voice.	This writing demonstrates lack of control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. Jarring errors impair communication.

In this lesson, you've thought about informational non-fiction in the form of critical essays. In the next lesson, you'll deal with a very popular form of non-fiction—the narrative essay.

Now open Assignment Booklet 3B, turn to the Section 3 Assignment, and respond to questions 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Lesson 33: Narrative Non-fiction

Writers of narrative non-fiction tap into two of people's greatest needs and desires when it comes to literature. These writers know that people love to hear stories—especially true stories; and they also know that readers want to learn something about people and life as they read.

What better vehicle to appeal to these needs than narrative non-fiction—true stories with a point!



Purposes of Narrative Non-fiction

Fiction writers, it goes without saying, know what it takes to entertain their audiences. A well-told story enables people to forget their everyday reality and escape for a time to another place, to be with different and often memorable people, and to gain insight about how people deal with problems and conflicts.

Narrative non-fiction can do all of this and more. To see an illustration of this, read Suzanne Plaut's "Centuries Away" on page 189 of the Readings section in the Appendix. If you studied *Macbeth* in ELA 20-1, the essay should have special appeal for you. When you've finished this short work of prose non-fiction, respond to the questions that follow.

