



Essay I Theory and Criticism: What's the Difference?

Due Wednesday.

[Please note that this is our general pattern: Discuss MWF, then submit essay on following Wednesday.]

And yes... I'm rather prescriptive, but I'll explain why.

I. I want you to learn a new introduction strategy, and it's not "Dr. Laga's strategy," but a strategy scholars often use. So, it's yet another writing tool for your rhetorical toolbox.

2. For this assignment, I'm more interested in WHAT you say than how you say it. That's why everyone's essay will be quite similar. If it helps, think of the assignment as a kind of exam that tests your understanding of what critics and theorists do. Please note that the clarification and your sample questions will reveal the most about what you grasp.

Prologue:

As an English major, you are not learning content as much as you are learning a methodology, a way of thinking, a way of making sense of how people use language to represent experience. At the most general level, you need to learn how to theorize and critique, but what do those terms even mean? Of course, the goal of English 421 is to help you develop those skills, but we need to lay a foundation, and that's the point of this assignment. However, there is a practical benefit as well. Once you complete the assignment, you will have a list of potential projects. As a result, you should never have writers block when it comes to saying something about a text. You're producing a heuristic that you can use later.

Assignment

Imagine that you are trying to define and explain the difference between "literary theory" and "literary criticism" to your college peers. You will need to clarify key terms, concepts, figures, and provide specific examples. Please follow this organizational pattern:

I. Introduction (one paragraph)

Read against traditional definitions of criticism and theory. Use introduction strategy #1. See "On Writing" on the website.

II. What do critics do? (multiple paragraphs: one paragraph per function/verb)

Please complete all three steps, and please note that all three steps belong in one paragraph. Dedicate one paragraph to every answer to "What do critics do?" you provide.

A. Begin paragraphs with bold, clear claims.

"Critics _____ [do what? Choose a verb.]

B. Clarify.

"In other words..." "As Lois Tyson reminds us..." "What Webster suggests here is that ..."

C. Supply examples/illustration.

Demonstrate what critics do by choosing a text and generating questions that a critic would ask about the text. There should be a one-to-one relationship between your definition and the questions your imaginary critic asks.

"For example, when reading *The Scarlet Letter*, a critic interested in interpretation would ask..." [List a bunch of questions that correspond to your definition.] "What is the significance of the wilderness/city settings? What is Pearl's role?" and so on.

III. What do theorists do? (multiple paragraphs: one paragraph per function/verb)

A. Begin paragraphs with bold, clear claims.

"Theorists _____ [do what? Choose a verb.]

B. Clarify.

"In other words..." "What I'm trying to say is..." "As Lois Tyson reminds us..." "What Webster points out here is that ..."

C. Supply examples/illustration.

Demonstrate what theorists do by generating questions that a theorist would ask. There should be a one-to-one relationship between your definition above and the questions your imaginary theorist asks here.

"For example, a theorist interested in examining fundamental assumptions might ask, ...

or

For example, a theorist might use *The Scarlet Letter* to ask some larger questions about quality, such as ...
[List a bunch of questions that correspond to your definition.]

IV. Conclusion

Don't just summarize. Instead, explain how theory and criticism relate or work together, or you could explain the value of criticism and theory to readers and/or teachers and/or writers.