

Prose Criticism

Prose is any structured writing that is not poetry! This could include essays, travel writing, diaries, journalism, novels and son on. Critical awareness is essential to your study of texts. In the writing of essays on the novel you will need to present a mixture of close critical reading and appreciation of the whole text.

*Before you write the essay read through the extract, at least **twice**, to get a general sense of what is happening, then take notes on the following ideas.*

- 1) Is a story being told, or is the focus something different?
- 2) Are there any descriptive passages, if so what attitude does the author use?
- 3) Is a **tone** established? Does the language contribute to this?
- 4) Who is speaking? Consider dialogue in the passage and **narrative point of view**. Consider character and reader.
- 5) What ideas are explored? How is this achieved? Through character, description, or narrative?
- 6) Does the focus of the passage change or develop?
- 7) Is there any tension in the passage? This could be achieved through anticipation, mystery, character, conflict or development or argument.
- 8) Is there a sense of beginning or ending in the passage? Perhaps the passage makes the reader anticipate events to come, or confuses through ambivalent perceptions?

After you have considered these points you need to consider the construction and effect of the passage in detail.

Narrative point of view

- 1) Who is the narrator?
- 2) Where are they placed (inside or outside the events of the text; is the narrator a character or placed outside as an observer)?

Structure is the way in which all the constituents of the text are related. A close study of the interaction between **setting**, **character** and **plot** will form the basis of your interpretation of the themes/ideas of the text.

- 1) Does the setting reflect the mood or motives of the character?
- 2) Are characters stereotyped according to the author's cultural moral pattern?
- 3) Does the plot develop to the point of a **resolution**?
- 4) Does it leave you in a state of **ambiguity**?

Language effects often work in a similar way to those of poetry. Of particular interest to an analysis of prose is the movement and design of sentences.

- 1) Does the paragraph or syntax lead to any special stress?
- 2) Does the sentence structure relate to the attitude, mood or tone of writing?

After making your notes use the following plan to help write your essay.

- 1) **Introduction.** A short paragraph about what the text conveys in a general way. Identify what type/style of writing it is.
- 2) **Write in detail.** Either focus on the areas defined above one at a time referring to the text as a whole in each case, or go through each paragraph of the passage commenting on all areas as you work through. Move to a whole text perspective.
- 3) **Conclusion.** Not just a summary, but an evaluation of the effects of the passage on you and a judgement of its success as writing.