

# Help Centres – English Support



## Literature Essay: Generating Ideas

Generating ideas for an analysis of a short story, novel, poem or drama begins the moment you first encounter the text. It's also a circular process: with each re-reading, your interpretations might evolve in different directions, contradict themselves, or build upon your initial impressions. The following handout provides techniques and considerations during this crucial initial stage of your essay writing.

1. When using your own copy of a text, read with a pen in hand so that you can circle relevant words and sentences or write immediate responses to the text in its margins or paragraph breaks.
2. After completing the text, or significant portions, document your responses and interpretations on a separate paper. Consider patterns of images, words or actions that appear; questions that have materialized as you read; aspects of the text that you have difficulty understanding. Discussing these impressions with a classmate or Instructional Assistant can also help crystalize your ideas about the text!
3. As you re-read the text, pay close attention to common literary elements (these will vary depending on the type of text). For example:
  - **Plot:** What is the main conflict of the text? Are the events presented in the order of their occurrence or is the sequence rearranged? If so, what could this be saying about the text?
  - **Character:** What roles do primary and secondary characters play? How are the characters presented: through narrative comments, dialogue, appearances, actions? Do the characters evolve? How credible are the characters?
  - **Point of View:** How knowledgeable is the narrator of the events and characters? What does the point of view reveal about the story itself? How trustworthy is the narrator?
  - **Setting:** How does the setting relate to the plot and characters? Does the setting itself bear any relation to the themes of the text?
  - **Theme:** What does the title suggest about the text? How is the theme, or themes, revealed: through dialogue, images, sounds, key patterns of diction?