



This is “Preface”, article 4 from the book [Creating Literary Analysis \(index.html\)](#) (v. 1.0).

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Preface

“And what is the use of a book...without picture or conversations,” muses Alice out of boredom at the beginning of *Alice in Wonderland*, that beloved fairy tale from the Victorian age. Alice pinpoints what younger readers know as truth: you need pictures in books, and lots of talking, particularly pictures of talking animals! Somehow there’s a metaphor here for *Writing about Literature through Theory*, the book that you are beginning to read. Yes, our book does have words and pictures. But there’s more. Most literature students are introduced to literary theory and writing about literature as separate subjects (with separate textbooks), though the two are intimately linked in the practice of literary scholarship. Literary scholarship is guided by literary theories and expressed through writing; it doesn’t make sense to learn each in isolation.

So what do we mean by “literary theory?” We’ll explain the phrase in more detail in [Chapter 1 "Introduction: What Is Literary Theory and Why Should I Care?"](#), but in short, literary theories are intellectual models that scholars use to understand stories, novels, poems, plays, and other texts. Different theories prioritize different historical, social, or methodological concerns. We believe students of literature should learn about many literary theories so they can discover which interpretive tools work best for them when they write about literature in their classes (and beyond). This book aims to help students build up a personal toolbox of interpretive possibilities.

Writing about Literature through Theory is designed to appeal to multiple audiences: the text can be used in introductory classes on literature, in composition classes that focus on literature, and in literature classes designed for English majors. What connects these multiple audiences is the book’s focus on literary theory, certainly, but also on its introduction to academic argument and its emphasis on the writing process. We begin each chapter with an excerpt from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) or *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872); these linked examples provide continuity chapter-to-chapter while quickly highlighting the particular literary theories under discussion in each. After each chapter’s introduction, we provide a more detailed overview of its literary theory using examples from classic literature but also more contemporary, popular works—including everyone’s favorite, *Harry Potter*.

Once we define the theory in each chapter, we guide students through the writing process—planning ideas, drafting a thesis statement, conducting peer review, and developing the final draft of the essay. To help students generate ideas, we provide

numerous writing prompts, some designed for group and classroom collaboration. In addition, we provide student examples in each chapter that demonstrate its literary theory in action. The process approach in *Writing about Literature through Theory* makes the text unique—and, we believe, highly useful in any composition or literature class, no matter what the level.

Writing about Literature through Theory, designed as both an introduction to using literary theory and an introduction to the process of writing, does not offer an overview of the elements of prose fiction, poetry, drama, or creative nonfiction, which we assume will be provided by the instructor as a supplement to the text. While we do not provide a discussion of the Modern Language Association (MLA) documentation style—which is standard in the study of literature, composition, and most humanities courses—we highlight the MLA style in action for each student essay—such as proper integration of quotations within the text, proper in-text citation, and proper construction of Works Cited lists. However, the format of each paper is designed for ease of reading on multiple platforms—electronic and print—so there are a few differences between page layout of our text and MLA style (multiple spaces between paragraphs, for example). If you desire further information about MLA style, you can find numerous websites that provide detailed overviews of MLA documentation style. Perhaps the most popular one comes from Purdue University’s Writing Lab, the OWL (Online Writing Lab): <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>. In particular, the OWL has a detailed description of page layout for MLA style, which you can access at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/media/pdf/20091250615234_747.pdf.

One of the benefits of *Writing about Literature through Theory* is that it is a Unnamed Publisher text, which represents the next evolution of textbook publishing. The format will allow you to custom design the chapters you will use, though the assumption is that every student and instructor will begin with Chapter 1 "Introduction: What Is Literary Theory and Why Should I Care?", which introduces readers to academic argument, the writing process, and an overview of the importance of literary theory to hone critical thinking and writing skills. The format also allows us—the authors—to update the text, to freshen examples, and to continually improve the text to meet the needs of the adopters.

We hope that *Writing about Literature through Theory* is a useful text, for we recognize, as does Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass* when the Red Queen tells her that once you write or say something, “It’s too late to correct it...when you’ve once said a thing, that fixes it, and you must takes the consequences.”