

Writing Essays about Literature

A Guide and Style Sheet

Seventh Edition

文学解读和论文写作：指南与范例
(第七版)

Kelley Griffith

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Kelley Griffith

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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导 读

丁宏为

大学阶段,按专业套路打好论说文写作的功底,这不仅有助于思维和表达,也会让人养成遵守学术规范的习惯。这是个浅显的道理,不过在国内,此类简单常识有时并不能引起我们足够的重视。无论在大学里,还是社会上,有关写作套路和规范的训练项目并不多见,指导性的书籍也不畅销。文化青年的撰述行为常似沙上建塔,产出很多,表现出的基本功还欠扎实,似乎又无何不妥,尚未影响我们成为社会和文化的栋梁。当然,基础不实,不仅相对于个人,整个文化慢慢也会出现一些问题。从这个角度看,出版一本英文的写作指南,虽属小事一件,但或许会对一部分人有固本荣枝的实际意义,也可以让其他文化对我们的文化有一点正面影响。

西方大学的人文教育环节中,经常会有论说文写作一类的课程,比如在美国的大学里,有一门课叫做 Expository Writing,通常是面向所有本科生的基础课程。Expository Writing 可以理解为阐释性写作,其字面意思是通过写作过程,expose 某篇文章或某个文本的内在含义,而 expose 的本来意思,就是指把某些东西从暗处拿到明处,从里面拿到外面,在研学的层面,也就成了揭示文内思想、阐说其中要义的意思。仅从文字概念看,“阐释性写作”已经与“论说文写作”有所区别,给“高谈阔论”留出的空间要小一些;说什么、论什么,都要建筑在理解内涵的基础上。

另一方面,阐释和写作放在一起,也就不只是简单的理解内涵的问

题。仅就本书所涉及的话题而言,阐释过程有两层意思:一是读懂文本的内涵,二是把阅读理解的收获清楚地用文字表达出来。阅读和理解的确是人类最重要的文化造诣之一,经历即阅历,不只是读书,也涉及读生活。而无论读生活,读社会,或是读文字中的社会与生活,都需要具有尽可能熟练的阅读能力。不过,阅读仅是整个理解过程的一半。无论产生多少感想,抓住多少要义,倘若不能阐释清楚,基本上等于阅读的失败。这是因为,揭示文本中的内涵与揭示我们自己有关文本的感想,这两种揭示之间的界线经常分不清楚,阐释我们的思想收获,可能就是在阐释外在的文本,也是另一篇文字形成的过程,成为我们理解力的物证。因此,离开表达谈阐释,意义不大。自己的话都说不清楚,文本的内涵何在?或者说,没有写作,阐释过程也不能完成。写作需要训练,正在于此,毕竟把话说清楚,并非易事。进一步讲,写作过程还可能有益理解,因为涉及如何把话说清楚,一个重要的指标就是尽可能贴近文本的基本意义框架。我们不得不尊重好文章之所以成为好文章的通则,不得不重视细节,不得不挖出证据,或许我们会养成用一种强有力的写作手法去高效率地抓住文本内涵的习惯。

而涉及阐释训练所需的对象,一些人文学者有共识:文学作品是最有效的文本。文学文本既是文字,也是生活,是浓缩的生活,里面有许多暗藏的空间,有不同的层面,也因此比其他类型的文本有更多的东西需要搬到明处,对理解力是较有效的挑战。文学文本因此应该成为大学基础阶段人文教育课程经常使用的阐释对象。而涉及文学,阐释概念就产生另一个侧重点,即本书编者所说的“解读”(interpretation)。“解读”之所以与“阐释”略有不同,是因为它有时期待我们使用某种手法、切入点或理论套路来完成阐释的过程。文学文本内容之丰富、空间之浩大,有时可以比及生活,既需要我们启动想象力,也要求我们面对文字的天地学会取道而行,乘舟以渡,这是文学作品的好处。我们不可能对所有行之有效的切入手法或解读路径都置之不理,动辄大家取法,云遮雾罩。更重要的是,我们还要学会遵守涉及论文写作过程的各种条条框框,尤其遵守各

种学术套路和规范。“凭空的”解读很可能成为空话,而套路和规范反倒让我们尽可能自然地、诚实地接近文本。因此,形式感和规则意识的培养也应该是思维训练的一部分。

论说、阐释、文学文本的解读、解读的文字体现——这些一步步互有关联的环节构成了大学人文教育的关键内容和手段,学生们经过反复训练,尽量做到言之有物、言之有据、言之有效,以期成为自主思维的个体,亦是有理性、有尊严的现代公民。倘若这样的人多一些,多发挥一点作用,那么,人文教育的成果或可以间接促进社会文化秩序的改善,说大话、说空话、说胡话的现象会引起多一点诧异,学人的失范行为或许会有所收敛,恶性的文化争吵或许能有所缓和。当然,这只是我们私下里憧憬的状态,毕竟我们所说的人文教育环节与文化秩序之间的关联实在显得遥远,没有多少人相信它的必然性,一些大学里并没有这样的基本环节,更提不上反复训练,却也都在正常运作。

而在较发达的国家,相信这个必然性的人并不罕见。我们国内书店里有关中文写作的书籍明显比不上诸如英语国家有关英语写作的书籍,它们的书架上经常摆放着各种各样的写作指南,从如何写信函到如何做文章,都在教人们如何把文字用好,书籍的数量如此之多,似乎表达着一种焦虑:人们多半不善思维,不会写作,至少不像他们自己所以为的那样,而思维不清,写作不灵,何来理性?若理性不强,是否会出现文化的无序?因此,一切都最终关乎文明社会的运作。对于一些窃守朦胧、崇尚感发的国内读者来说,过多的条条框框会让我们嗅到洋八股的味道,毕竟文字与意义之间的关系不可能那样机械,不可能有完美的吻合。我们的感觉并非没有道理,但容易让我们忽略改进的空间和训练的益处。太多的具体问题可以拿来诊断,它们可能并无国界,比如国外写作指南中经常涉及的一些症状,像话语类型的混淆、不辨视角、滥用套语、不具体、兜圈子、无依据、无主题段或主题句、无结尾、随意抄袭,等等。改掉这些毛病,有何不好?一个建设文明秩序的社会,对这些坏习惯的包容度需要有所降低,尤其在大学校园里。

眼下这本书涉及文学解读和阐释性写作的各种关键环节,从基本功到高级的批评,从涉及文学阅读的简单的“人之常情”到复杂的文学解读类论文,几乎面面俱到,是一本关乎人文训练的有效指南。纵观其整体结构,本书旨在达到三个方面的目的。第一,在如何解读文学作品方面提供指导和建议,提出基本套路,并在第3章至第5章中分别就小说、戏剧和诗歌这三种文学形式,具体说明文学阅读过程的关键因素,既强调此过程与我们个人经历的关系,也进而在第6章中列举专业文学批评领域内代表不同兴趣和评论流派和视角。第二,在如何撰写文学解读类型的文章方面提供指南,包括确定基本手法,并在如何选择话题、如何通过具体环节一步步完成论文写作过程等方面提出建议。第三,确立规范,并在具体写作体例等方面提供指导,比如涉及如何使用别人的评论材料和如何利用网络资源等方面,都有详细的解释和说明,所提供的依据是由美国现代语言协会(MLA)制定的研究论文规范。本书清清楚楚地确立了一系列行之有效的步骤和规则,体现编者个人多年积累和大学教师的集体经验,所依赖具体范例之多,更有助于展示从阅读到写作的整个过程。

我国目前英语学习者人数众多,设立英文系科的大专院校数以百计,高考扩招后,学生源源不绝,研究生的数量也骤然增多。人数激增,反映了初期开放社会的实用理念,但涉及教育内容,倒不必只限于满足近期的市场需求。换一个角度看,庞大的学习群体为英文教师对社会多做一点贡献提供了条件。英语专业一般都开设写作课,除专注于应用写作或散文抒表外,也可以尝试以上提到的系统人文训练,还可以在其他课上增加文学解读的比重,并反复激励学生依照有效套路撰写英文论文,以期让思想和语言变得更规范、正确、成熟、有力。英语学习者的综合水平不会因此而降低,但更重要的是我们有意无意中接受了理性的影响,人文素质有所提高,或许相对于较少受过如此训练的人而言,更有资格站在人们常说的文化前沿。

2006年5月22日

Writing Essays about Literature



Kelley Griffith

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PREFACE



Over twenty years ago, I wrote the first edition of this book in response to questions students asked when I assigned essays in my literature courses: “What should I look for?” “What’s an essay?” “How long should it be?” “Do we have to use outside sources?” “How should I document sources?” Many students had little or no experience writing arguments, not only about literature but about anything. They struggled to get started. This book was my answer to their questions. The initial edition gave a brief introduction to the study of literature, defined key critical terms, explained details of usage (the “style sheet” part of the book), and included sample essays that would illustrate good student writing.

Writing Essays about Literature: A Guide and Style Sheet has evolved over the years, and this, the seventh edition, still strives to answer key questions students raise about studying literature and writing about it. First, in Part One (Chapters 1 through 6), this book provides extensive guidance about reading literature. Chapter 1 (Strategies for Interpreting Literature) poses the question that undergirds the entire book: How can we interpret literature? Chapters 2 through 5 are discussions of the nature of literature and the three major literary genres—fiction, drama, and poetry. These chapters define the elements of literature and provide heuristics—questions, “Thinking on Paper” exercises, and “Now It’s Your Turn” assignments—that lead readers toward their own interpretations. Chapter 6,

with its brief discussions of critical approaches, invites readers to study all aspects of literature.

Second, the book offers guidance for writing about literature. Chapter 7 (Writing about Literature) serves as an introduction to Part Two and poses the question, How can we write about literature? The primary focus of Part Two is the interpretive essay, but Chapter 7 and subsequent chapters also give attention to more “personal” kinds of writing, such as free writing, notes, and journals. Chapters 8 through 10 are arranged according to the four stages of the writing process: inventing, drafting, revising, and editing. Chapter 8 (Choosing Topics) suggests strategies for generating topics. Chapter 9 (Drafting the Essay) emphasizes the argumentative nature of essays about literature. It covers strategies for reasoning, organizing, and developing an essay from early drafts to a final draft. Chapter 10 (Revising and Editing) provides advice about revising, rules for quotations and other matters of usage, and guidelines for the essay’s appearance and format.

Third, the book serves as a style guide. Both Chapter 10, with its treatment of usage, and Chapter 11 (Research and Documentation) carry out this purpose. Chapter 11 explains what research papers are, how to find information and opinions, how to incorporate them into essays, and how to document sources using the MLA style. The book concludes with a chapter on taking essay tests and a chapter containing four student essays—one on a poem, one on a short story, one on a play, and one on a novel.

This edition, extensively revised, features many new elements.

SUBHEADS

Additional subheads indicate where specific terms and concepts are treated. They make these discussions more visible and easy to find.

CHECKLISTS

Checklists at the end of relevant chapters (especially the chapters on fiction, drama, poetry) serve as overviews of the chapters and lists of key things to do.

GLOSSARY

A glossary of critical terms, located at the back of the book, gives brief definitions of critical terms discussed in the text.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

A new heuristic, “Now It’s Your Turn,” also joins the “Questions about . . .” and “Thinking on Paper about . . .” directives that appear after discussions of generic elements. “Now It’s Your Turn” invites readers to explore complete works, printed in the book, such as Mary Robison’s short story “Yours,” Susan Glaspell’s play *Trifles*, and numerous poems. The assumption is that readers, having read the discussion of a generic element, would enjoy the challenge of applying the concepts on their own, without prompts from the author.

COMPLETE REVISION OF THE CHAPTER ON FICTION

This revision includes concepts that are now staples in narratology. New discussions include:

- ♦ The place of the author in the text
- ♦ Point of view (new terminology, treatment of narratees)
- ♦ Plot (“plot” and “story,” beginnings and endings, embedded stories, frame stories, summary narration, scenic narration)
- ♦ Characterization (methods of representing characters’ thoughts)

“Yours,” a complete short story by Mary Robison, serves as discussion matter for “Now It’s Your Turn” prompts.

COMPLETE REVISION OF THE CHAPTER ON POETRY

New to this edition are poems by Matsuo Basho, Elizabeth Bishop, Louise Bogan, Emily Brontë, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Browning, Taniguchi Buson, e. e. cummings, Emily Dickinson, George Herbert, Langston Hughes, Kobayashi Issa, Jane Kenyon, Amy Lowell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Ezra Pound, plus an anonymous ballad, “The Daemon Lover.”

New or expanded treatments include:

- ❖ How to read a poem the first time
- ❖ The role of the speaker (including the speaker's connection to the author)
- ❖ Syntax (how to cope with fractured syntax)
- ❖ Lines as a structural feature of poetry
- ❖ Enjambment
- ❖ Ballad and common (hymn) meter
- ❖ The haiku
- ❖ Visual poetry
- ❖ Rhythm
- ❖ Word sounds
- ❖ Free verse

UPDATING OF GUIDELINES AND RESOURCES

The sections on usage and documentary style have been revised according to the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. All resources listed in the book, including Internet sites, have been checked for accuracy.

I have written this book out of a long-standing love for literature. My hope is that the book's information and suggestions will help readers get as much pleasure from literature as it has given me over the years. The book can serve several related purposes. Teachers can use it as a textbook in introductory courses and as a supplement in advanced ones. Students can use it on their own as an introduction to the study of literature, as a guide to writing essays about literature, and as a reference manual.

I welcome comments and suggestions from users of this book. My e-mail address is <kelley_griffith@uncg.edu>. Regular mail is English Department, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27412.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is all around us. We find it in school courses, where we study great masterpieces of the past. We run into it in drugstores, where best sellers occupy long ranks of shelves. We experience it in the poetry slams of coffee houses and night spots. The devices of literature show up in popular media. Hip-hop music incorporates its rhythms and rhymes. Movies and television shows co-opt its mythic stories and character types. Internet websites reinvent its plot strategies. Graphic artists enhance its psychological explorations with powerful visual illustrations. Politicians clothe themselves in its images of competence and authority. Every day, even when we aren't aware of it, literature gives our lives zest and imparts its wisdom.

Like all art, literature gives pleasure. It has a certain magic that transports us from the "real" world to seemingly remote and enjoyable places. We can experience this quality without thinking about it. But literature also poses intellectual challenges that do demand thought. For most readers, grappling with these challenges enhances the pleasure of literature. By studying literature, we "see" more of it to appreciate. We learn that, far from being remote from life, literature reflects the real world and helps us locate our places in it.

This book addresses two related questions: (1) How can we read literature? and (2) How can we write about it? The questions are related because we have to read literature skillfully in order to write

about it. In turn, writing about literature stimulates our understanding of it.

There are many ways to read and write about literature. This book focuses on one way—interpretation. *Interpretation* is the act of making sense of something, of establishing its meaning. When we interpret literature, we explore its meaning. To do this well, we employ strategies of discovery, analysis, and reasoning. Exploring those strategies—for reading and writing—is the subject of this book.

Part One of the book takes up the first question, how to read. Chapter 1 discusses the process of interpretation and follows up with some basic strategies for interpreting literature. The rest of Part One concentrates on “places” in literature to look for meaning: the properties of literature itself (Chapter 2) and of fiction (Chapter 3), drama (Chapter 4), and poetry (Chapter 5). The concluding chapter of Part One examines specialized strategies of interpretation, each of which illuminates potential sources of meaning in literature.

Part Two considers the question of how to write. It is organized according to a process many writers follow: inventing (deciding what to write about), drafting (writing first drafts), revising (writing more drafts), and editing (producing a final draft for “publication”). Throughout Part Two, and most notably in the final chapter, samples of student writing illustrate interpretative writing.

Although each part of the book follows an orderly path—a step-by-step process for reading and writing—you can also use the book as a handbook. Part One covers such things as the elements of literature and of genres (fiction, drama, and poetry), as well as theoretical approaches such as historicism, New Criticism, structuralism, deconstruction, new historicism, and feminist and gender criticism. Part Two gives information about, among other things, generating topics, organizing essays, using logic, doing research, documenting sources, handling quotations, and taking tests. The location of all of this material is easy to find, especially when you use the Glossary and the Index of Concepts and Terms located at the back of the book. If you do not remember where a definition or explanation is, just look it up in the Glossary and in that index.

We begin, then, with reading.

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