A literature paper analyzes, interprets, or evaluates a text, answering such questions as “What is the significance of the three scaffold scenes in The Scarlet Letter?” “What does the cherry orchard in Anton Chekhov’s The Cherry Orchard represent?” “What is the significance of the setting in John Steinbeck’s ‘The Chrysanthemums’?” “How effective is the use of first-person narrative in John Updike’s ‘A&P’?” The writer of a literary essay should answer such questions with a meaningful and persuasive analysis that supports ideas and assertions with specific evidence from the text.

- Is the thesis clearly stated? Is the organization logical and easy to follow?
- Does the writer use examples from the text to convincingly support his or her interpretation or analysis?
- Has the writer avoided giving a simple plot summary?
- Are parts of a work clearly and accurately indicated? Writers need to refer to parts specifically, for example, “the scene in which . . .” or “at the end of Chapter 3.”
- Does the writer use the present tense when describing events in a work of literature, as is the convention? (This practice often confuses students. You might explain that the author is communicating to a present reader in the present time.)
- Are titles properly punctuated or underlined? Titles of short stories, essays, and most poems appear in quotation marks; titles of books, plays, epics, or other long poems are italicized or underlined.
- Has the writer referred to the author properly, using the full name initially and the last name in subsequent references?
- Is quoted material properly punctuated, indented (if longer than four typed lines of prose or three lines of verse), and documented according to the format specified by the teacher?