

Analysing characters in literature

Characters are the most important part of a novel or a short story. They are what drives the plot¹ and the story forward. Most often, the author uses the character to generate² the theme of the story. If you are making a critical analysis of a character in a story or novel, you have to thoroughly³ read who and what these characters are and how they are related to the theme of the story.

Getting to know the character: Take notes and find quotes

To start your analysis of the character, identify how the character is described in the story. What is the physical and psychological description of the character and where (line, page) can you find it?

- description of the character by the narrator (ex.: *She has always run away when things got difficult.*)
- descriptions by other characters (ex.: *"She's the most arrogant person, I've ever seen," Angela said.*)
- What does the character do/say ?
- How can the character's relationships be described?
- How does the character live? What differences and similarities are there in comparison to the other characters in the story?
- Does the character have any motive? Find out what drives the character.
- Does the character have weaknesses? Is he/she him-/herself?
- What are the talents/ positive qualities of the character?
- What do you think, why did the author create the character?

2. Writing a characterization: State-Quote-Explain

RULE A: Write in the present tense

RULE B: State-Quote-Explain

State: Angela is a *self-centred* girl.

Quote: Proof of this can be found in ll. 7-8: "I was enjoying the sensation and didn't notice her mood."

Explain: At the beginning of the story Angela, who is fascinated by the glamorous and exclusive atmosphere of the mall, doesn't pay any attention to Gracey's mood. Her self-centred behaviour goes on, when she decides to buy Gracey a coffee without asking her so-called friend if she wanted one (ll.15-16). When she commands Gracey to "wait here" (l. 31) in front of the jewellery store she hadn't asked for her friend's opinion before. In fact, Gracey doesn't say much at all and Angela does most of the talking (l. 12).

Angela appears to be far more dominant than Gracey which eventually leads to the argument between the girls, when Gracey finally finds her voice.

¹ the plot - Handlung

² (to) generate - entwickeln

³ thoroughly - genau

RULE C: Use linking words like "since, when, moreover, besides, despite, thus...".
Use lots of different adjectives to describe a person.

3.) The overall structure of your essay

1. Introduction

*In the novel/ short story ... by ... the reader meets two different characters called...
The novel/... by ... is about/deals with the topic of...*

2. Analysis

3. Conclusion

What can we learn from the character? / How did the character change throughout the story? / ...

Phrases for characterizations

- Another important fact is (that) ...
- Another significant aspect is...
- From this one can conclude that ...
- However, even if x is... he, she is ...
- Not only does x, he, she also ...
- Proof of this can be found in line(s) when x....
- Since x is portrayed as a ..., x can be called a ...
- This behavior clearly indicates that x ...
- This is also the reason why (x can be summed up in)...
- This reveals that x is....
- To sum up... / Finally ...
- Without any doubt ...
- x is portrayed as ...
- x represents (the) ...
- x seems to be...