**Researching Theory**

**As you research your theory, keep a record of the sources used. Write correct bibliographical information in APA form right from the start!**

**The Task:** **Write an academic research paper for the journal *Insights into Literature*. Use a focus question to evaluate the effectiveness of at least two selected theories (or aspects of those theories) in producing a close reading/s of your chosen complex literary text/s.**

**Tip**: Your focus question should be quite narrow. E.g. focus on one character or one group of characters or one aspect of setting.

1. **Choose two broad theories, one from group A and one from group B:** NB You may be able to use theoretical approaches from Group A as part of the methodology of Group B theorists.

**Group A text-centered**

* Structuralism – binary oppositions, semiotics, narratology
* Deconstruction – Aporia, gaps, silences, contradictions, phallogocentrism etc.

**Group B world-context centered**

* Feminism (second wave, third wave, Anglo-American (Showalter/Gilbert and Gubar), French poststructuralist feminism (Cixous/Irigaray/Kristeva)
* Marxism (Marx, Althusser)
* Post colonialism (Said, Spivak, Bhabba)
* Ecocriticism (Glotfelty)
* Psychoanalytical (Freud, Lacan, Kristeva)

1. **My Broad Theory:**

* Watch a few short **You Tube videos**, if available, on your broad theories then read **Wikipedia** and other reputable documents from the **Internet or theory books**, on your broad theory.
* Read any relevant documents and view any relevant PowerPoint presentations **on NEST**.
* You need an overall view of the broad theory, before you begin more specific research, so that you can place your specific theory in a context. You also need to place the broad theory in a context, if appropriate: structuralist/deconstructionist/poststructuralist

This Purdue University site is a good place to begin. <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_theory_and_schools_of_criticism/index.html>

For introductory information on several theories see also Dino Felluga’s <https://cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/theory/>

1. **My Specific Theorist/s:**

* Begin to **focus on the actual theorists and aspects of theories** you have chosen to apply. Again, watching a few short video clips is a good introduction.
* See links on NEST, reputable internet sites (e.g. university sites, reputable journals) and theory books.
* Begin to **read more deeply** about the theorist as you decide **which aspects of the theory** most suit your research paper. Which questions will you ask? What analytical tools, terms and concepts will you apply? Which aspect of the theory will you apply? Take notes and record notes which directly relate to your focus.
* Find information on the **strengths and limitations** of the specific theories or aspects of theories you will use. VIP for evaluation marks
* Don’t stop at one theorist/one term! E.g. If the term you want to explore in applying Julia Kristeva’s theory is ‘the abject’ or ‘abjection’, what other Kristeva term/s can be used in this context?
* Do not rely too heavily on one source, say a university thesis, which seems to address your focus question. This would be plagiarism. Besides, they are unlikely to be applying theory in exactly the way you are instructed to apply theory to text.
* **Categorize your notes** – have an organizational method so that you can find what you want easily.

**Are there any other suggestions, questions or insights?**

**List the broad theories, specific theorists and specific terms you are currently thinking of using in your research task.**

Don’t forget to undertake research on your complex text.

Task says: *To complete this task, you must: Analyse the genre, structure and textual features of your chosen complex literary text/s to support valid interpretations.*

What is the basis plot/theme of the text **as it relates to your focus**? Why do you find this text interesting? How might it lend itself to the application of the theories you have chosen? Identify the genre. E.g. dystopian satire, dystopian fiction, gothic, realist and so on. What is the purpose of the genre?

**Analyzing your novel – producing close readings of your text.**

**Smoothly integrate theory and analysis/reading of text. E.g.**

**Heart of Darkness/Feminist Theory**

‘**Phallogocentrism’ is a quintessential term in the second-wave feminist theory of Gilbert and Gubar (ref), used to deconstruct a text. It refers to the privileging of the phallus in the construction of meaning in language and the implicit belief that the male sexual organ is the only one of significance and authority and, as a result, women can be “*defined only in terms of their relation to men, only in terms of what they lack”* (ref).** *Heart of Darkness* can definitely be construed as being a phallogocentric text. The dominance of the phallus is asserted several times throughout the narrative, specifically when…………… **introduce example/incident – quote (ref).** The guns can be read as symbolic of……………………………... Another powerful example of the phallogocentrism of the text is when **Event/explanation/quote/s.** Again, this is clearly symbolic of the men’s attempt to subjugate the woman with their……………………………..

**Note explanation of theory then smooth transition to applying the theory in order to read the novel in a particular way. How was this transition achieved?**

**Note how a conclusion is drawn at the end of the analysis.**

**Brokeback Mountain and The Shipping News/ecocriticism/semiotics**

**An ideal literary tool for use with ecocritical theory, especially when investigating the representation of nature within a text, is Saussure’s semiotics. Semiotic analysis “*sees a text as an object constructed from a social system of signs*” (ref), forming a link between the sign (the object/image in the text) and the signified (what it represents). When semiotics is applied from an ecocritical perspective, these ‘signs’ are primarily cultural symbols which portray an aspect or facet of nature.**

**Semiotic investigation reveals several ‘signs’ within the book which relate directly to the impact of nature** on the lives of Quoyle and his family. For instance, Quoyle’s various one-time homes may be interpreted as signs indicating the state of his life. Initially, Quoyle is *“stuck in bedraggled Mockingburg…a place in its third death”*, a town in slow decline, mirrored by Quoyle’s personal stagnation and relationship breakdowns. Quoyle’s move to *“harsh”* Newfoundland and the old family house also portents a change in his character, as he slowly comes to terms with his past, strengthening his character until he is able to determine his future. A dramatic emphasis on the symbolic significance of Quoyle’s residences as yardsticks for his life is also seen in the destruction of the old family house Newfoundland, held onto the rock by cables, in a violent storm. The house, throughout the text, reflects the nightmare of abuse which was the history of the Quoyles. Like the concept it signifies, the building is *“poor and mean”*, painted a *“sickening”* shade of green. It is literally lashed to a rock, a sign representing Quoyle bearing a great weight. The cables, which attach the house to the rock, are a metaphor for the memories and emotions which tie the Quoyle to his unhappy past. These are severed in a mighty storm, a symbol of change. This event signifies the beginning of a new era for Quoyle and his family who are freed from their brooding past. Natura is thus a potent catalyst.

**Note the detailed references to the text.**

**Read the QCAA exemplar response several times in order to understand how theoretical approaches may be used to read text in different ways.**