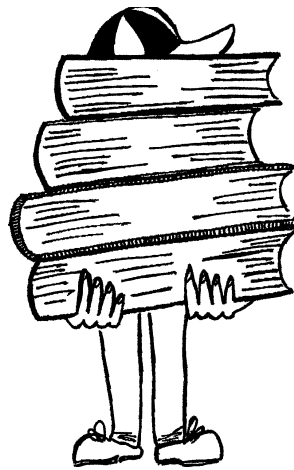
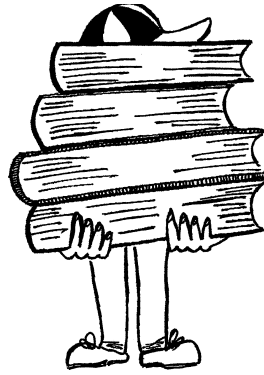


Literary Criticism Concepts Volume 3: Essay Skills



Jennifer Bussey





Congratulations! We salute you!
You are traveling down the road that will clarify some of the complexities of
the multitude of literary terms competitors should know!

For students seeking expertise in Literary Criticism, this edition of our Literary Concepts makes getting the "big picture" a breeze with easy-to-understand lists, tables, and charts. Volume 1, Literary History, gives context with at-a-glance overviews of periods and major writers in each period. Volume 2, Literary Terms, is organized by genre, with chapters on poetry, fiction, non-fiction, drama and more. Volume 3, Essay Skills, makes "sizing up" selections less daunting and can help turn shaky writers into concise, creative ones. This volume also helps students understand what judges are expecting and includes how-to's for pulling an essay together from beginning to end. Our newest edition, Volume 4, Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes tackles the endless lists of literary prizes covered on the test. Prize lists are broken out by decade, geography, ethnicity, and anomalies to bring meaning to the lists, which results in better recall. And by cross-referencing all winners with entries in the Handbook, we have done the work so you have everything you need at a glance.

Jennifer Bussey is the author of all of our Literary Criticism products for UIL as well as our Ready Writing products. She completed her undergraduate degree in English and has a Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies. Bussey is currently an independent writer specializing in literature; her work appears in reference books released nationally by major educational publishers, including *Contemporary Authors*, *Poetry for Students*, *Novels for Students*, *Epics for Students*, *Encyclopedia of American Poetry: The Twentieth Century*, and *Literature of Developing Nations*. Her work also appeared on the Web and in national magazines, and she recently completed her second anthology for *Events that Shaped History*. A skilled writer, Bussey takes our study materials and tests to a new and challenging level.

We are a small company that listens; we encourage comments. If there is an area that you would like fully explored, let us hear from you! Our best products have been developed from your suggestions, and we encourage your interchange with us.

LitCrit Concepts - Volume 3
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Preface: How This Book Will Help You

Welcome to Lit Crit Concepts, Volume 3: Essay. Either you are comfortable writing essays, or you are not. If you are good at essays and have no burning vendetta against the Tie-Breaker essay required at the end of the Literary Criticism test, you are both talented and fortunate! However, if just reading this (which makes you think about the mysterious and often cruel Tie-Breaker essay) is making you clammy and itchy, you are not alone. In either case, the principles and exercises in this book are going to help you go into the test with a strategy, no matter how familiar or unfamiliar you are with the reading selection. I mean, really, just knowing you have a process at all will put your mind at ease and enable you to put your best work on paper.

This book is going to walk you through a number of strategies and exercises specifically for the Lit Crit essay. So, if you need all kinds of help, the best thing for you to do is to work your way through the whole book, then go back to the chapters where you need reinforcement. If you are only struggling in one or two areas, you have my permission and blessing to skip straight to those chapters and be on your way. Throughout the year, you may want to return to the book to strengthen certain aspects of your essay-writing. And although this book is geared specifically toward the Lit Crit tests, the skills you develop will help you write in other areas as well. So, when you win your Oscar for screenwriting or get a trillion dollars for being such a great blogger, remember me.

Have a great year, and good luck at UIL!

–Jennifer Bussey

EXERCISE:

Write out a very long sentence. Make it as long as you can, but have a main idea in mind. If you are having trouble thinking of what to say, try one of these prompts:

- Think of a person in your life, and write out something you want that person to know.
- Think of a celebrity, and write about what you think of him or her.
- Describe one of the greatest (or worst) trips you have ever taken, including what made it so great (or so awful).
- What is one of your favorite books? Write a sentence about why you love it, why you think one of the characters is so well-written, what the story was about, or what one of the themes is.
- Reveal your secret desire to be able to do something, and tell why you wish you could do it.
- Explain how you feel about Lit Crit and/or the essay portion of the test.

Once you have your sentence, you are going to rewrite it a little shorter. Go for cutting it down by 25%-50%. Then take your shorter sentence, and do it again. Go for cutting another 25%-50% of that sentence. Now, reread your sentence. It should be a lot tighter now. What is the essence of what you want to say? Don't worry about leaving in every funny comment, long word, or moving phrase. Really look for the heart of that sentence, and take one more run at it. Cut as much or as little as you think is necessary to finish with a clear, concise expression.

Example:

First sentence:

When I go off running around the neighborhood with my dogs BooBoo, Rocky, Flopster, Barkley, Casper, and Toto, I just absolutely love the way the morning air helps me wake up, even though the dogs are totally yanking my shoulder out of the socket, and it helps me get ready for the day so much that I keep thinking that I really should take my camera sometime and see if I can capture the morning mood with that, maybe from some different angles, or if I should just pick a theme song that makes me feel like I'm in a movie or something!

Second sentence:

When I go running around the neighborhood with my dogs, I love the way the morning air helps me wake up, even though the dogs are pulling so hard, and I feel like I am ready for the day so much that I wish I could have a picture or a song to go with it so I could hold onto that feeling all day long.

Final sentence:

Language

For a strong essay, using your own voice is really important. I realize that you are to a point in your education that you are probably still finding your voice in formal writing. That said, using as natural a style as possible makes a big difference in your essay. Try to avoid being too casual because it makes you look like you are not serious, and it threatens your credibility. The judges do not know you at all, and they only have 150 words in front of them. It is a competition, after all, so you want to look as authoritative as possible.

The other side of that coin is to avoid sounding like you are trying too hard. The judges do not expect an essay written by a college professor who has been lecturing for thirty years and published 130 scholarly articles. Students are sometimes tempted to puff up their essays by using long words or stilted diction that ultimately comes across as artificial. I am not saying not to use a long word if that is the right word because you should certainly bring your best vocabulary to the essay. But choosing a long word that sort of fits instead of a shorter word that fits perfectly is not the way to go.

Remember, one of the criteria is proper grammar. When you practice writing Lit Crit essays, it is a great idea to run them past your English teacher, UIL teacher, or a tutor. Any one of those people can help you identify places that need to be tightened up, and they can show you how to do it. They can also guide you in word choice, sentence length, and other factors that have to do with the language and style you are presenting in your essay. If you have not given much thought to this part of preparing for your test, do so. After all, the language is the messenger for your brilliant essay, so the stronger your style is, the stronger the essay will be. And vice-versa. Putting in the extra work on this for UIL carries the added benefit of strengthening your writing skills in general, which will help you as a student now and in the future.

EXERCISE:

Go back to the essays you wrote for the last exercise in the chapter titled "The Number One Rule." It was the exercise where you practiced outlining and writing essays. Choose one essay from the first of the three categories (familiar poetry). Rewrite the essay twice, once making the language too casual, and once making it artificially formal. Last, rewrite the original again to make the style stronger and more clearly in your voice. Can you see the difference? You now have four versions of the exact same information, but in different styles. Read your essays through the eyes of a judge. Now, do the same for the other two categories (less familiar poetry and unfamiliar poetry).