



DALLAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Parsing Literature

Semantic, Syntactic, Phonemic, and Morphemic Analysis

When parsing, think scientifically. Do not analyze or criticize the text. **The goal is not literary analysis, but discovering how the author employs sentence structure, word choice, and sound to enhance the meaning of his or her work.** Get into the details—pull the story apart at its most basic levels: words and sentences. Ask questions like “Why does the author use fragments so often?”, or “Why does the author use passive voice?” Consider how these elements affect or add to the author’s meaning for the work.

Read the piece several times to be familiarized enough with it to notice details of the text. Some elements to consider:

- Sentence length
- Voice (active or passive)
- Gerunds
- Verbs
- Punctuation
- Alliteration
- Assonance
- Consonance
- Rhyme
- Adverb use
- Language in general (how does the word choice enhance the meaning?)
- Ambiguity

If any of these seem prevalent, read the story over again with the goal of finding out why. For example, if the author frequently uses passive voice, he or she may be emphasizing how the main character is passive or is not in control of his situation.

Be specific. Count how many times the author uses fragments, the word “good”—anything noticeable that is common in the text. Remember that you want to show how the words themselves and the way in which the author puts them together help to convey the meaning of the piece.