

What is Character Analysis?

Character analysis can be used to study someone you know or someone in a text—a narrative, poem, short story, novel, play, or biography. In history, psychology, art, and education courses, you may be asked to analyze the traits of a particular person in order to understand the time period, the created work, or the behavior of important figures.

Organizing and Developing a Character Analysis Essay

Whether you are examining a subject from life or print, you will want to observe and record telling details—those that reveal something significant about the person. As you study a character, you will accumulate lots of facts, some that you will discard as irrelevant and others that you will decide are indicative of the person's character. From these facts you will be able to make assumptions about your subject's personality and character. **In fact, the heart of your analysis will depend on inference—that is, a hypothesis that you formulate about character based on the facts that you have observed.**

Prewriting for a Text-Based Character Study

As you actively read the play, note specific examples of speech, behavior, and thought that reveal the character. Read the text with an alert eye, pulling examples, important phrases, and key lines for your list. Mix facts and your responses or inferences about them as you go along. You do not need to evaluate the quality of each example as you write your notes; you will sort, eliminate, and reword examples later.

Character Trait Index Cards (Preparation for writing the essay!)

1. **Keep separate index cards for each character trait** that you observe while you are reading. Record the page numbers each time you see that trait reappearing. By the time that you have completed the play, you may have fifteen or twenty different "inference cards," each with a different trait written at the top and each with many recorded page numbers. The cards that have similar traits can be grouped, the traits with few page numbers can be ignored, and the traits that look most useful for a character study can then be shaped into focus points for the paper.

Note Cards:

2. The character trait on the cards will form the focus points for the paper (see examples below). These cards can then be arranged for a draft.
3. Since your purpose is to write a character analysis, you need to look for and record telling descriptions, behaviors, and speech that will help you determine and prove what kind of person that character is. Be sure you note the following on the note cards:
 - a. character trait
 - b. concrete detail
 - c. page number in parenthesis after the concrete detail
 - d. two points of analysis

Example Paraphrased and Quoted Note Cards:

Character Trait: self-absorbed

Concrete Detail: When a "car she didn't know" pulls into her driveway, Connie's first concern is to check her hair and wonder "how bad she looked" (138).

Analysis: She feels that her physical attractiveness is at the root of everything. She reasons that the tension existing between herself and her mother is because her mother is jealous that her own looks are gone.

Character Trait: self-absorbed

Concrete Detail: Connie has habits of always looking at herself in mirrors and "checking other people's faces to make sure her own was all right" (135).

Analysis: These two practices reveal her insecurity and contradict the self-assuredness of her belief that "she was pretty and that was everything" (135).

Arranging and Thesis Construction

Consider how you will arrange your character traits and the specific examples that support the traits. What do you want to emphasize in your analysis? Consider ending your character analysis with the trait that you find more significant or most indicative of character. By using your most emphatic point in the terminal spot in your paper, you will have a natural conclusion—one that gets at both the heart of your subject and the theme of the story.

Perhaps the place to start is with the most obvious feature of the subject for analysis because it will take less effort to convince your audience of your perception if your reader shares your perception. In the case of Connie, the writer might address her preoccupation with her looks or her apparent self-assuredness. The writer might also want to look at her flawed family relationships or her boy-craziness. Depending on how you perceive Connie, you may want to order the inferences in your thesis to reflect the reasons for her behavior. Your final character inference should lead naturally to the conclusion of your paper, and you will want to keep this in mind as you order the inferences in your thesis.

Determining a Thesis: You need to have a thesis for your character study (analysis). You can determine one by using the character traits that you perceived during grouping. Remember that your thesis expresses a view about a **limited subject**, such as Connie's character. Please **don't** feel that you need to discuss all aspects of one's character. If you have many observations in your prewriting, you know you have good support ready.

Example Thesis Statements about Connie: Here are some possibilities for thesis statements for the character analysis of Connie. Remember, each writer's perceptions and preferences will determine the thesis and the order in which the information will be presented.

1. Although Connie appears to be a self-assured teenager, she is actually an insecure, sexually innocent, two-sided girl whose inexperience does not prepare her for the encounter with Arnold Friend.
2. Connie seeks male attention, hangs out with older kids, and affects a sexy exterior, but she is no match for someone with criminal intentions.
3. Connie's life is filled with paradoxes: she is a gregarious girl without a true friend; she lives in a traditional family but has no real bonds with family members; she craves the attention of boys but does not know how to protect herself. Ultimately, these paradoxes render her vulnerable to an attack by someone like Arnold Friend.
4. Because Connie's home life is deficient, Connie develops survival mechanisms. She daydreams, evades interaction with her family, and deceives her family and friends—behavior that could not help her withstand Arnold Friend.
5. Connie projects a brazen, rebellious exterior that masks the naive, insecure girl within.