

Writing Advice

Effective Writing Center



UMUC

Dear Student,

Congratulations on your progress in writing this assignment for ENGL 303. Reading this draft of your paper convinces that you are extraordinarily adept at critical thinking. That's a great asset, especially for the task of literary analysis by application of theoretical principles. You have done a truly exquisite job of analyzing this important play!

My name is *Gay*, and it's my pleasure to work with you today.

You are welcome to come to the Effective Writing Center for help at any stage in the writing process, whether you are having trouble understanding an assignment or want feedback on a rough draft. At the EWC we are attentive readers who help you improve as a writer by explaining and modeling effective writing skills. For a more detailed discussion of our services, please consult the [EWC Web site](#)

PLEASE NOTE

- Advisors may not be experts in the topic your paper covers.
- Advisors will not make any judgment about the grade your paper may receive.
- Advisors do not copyedit papers. Sections of your paper will be used to model the editing you should do.
- Advisors know only as much about the assignment that you share. Please provide an assignment description in the submission form.

Advice Overview

Resources to help you revise your writing assignment are hyperlinked within this letter and in the [More Resources](#) section at the end. Before reading this advice, please review the writing that you submitted and have a copy handy. Excerpts from your paper will be noticeable for the **bold orange** font I'll use.

You've done well to complete this draft of the paper. Now let's look at requirements for the assignment, below.

Assignment Requirements

Assignment Requires	What You Have	What You Need
A research paper demonstrating critical analysis of one of the main themes in a play of your choice from your textbook	Excellent draft!	Refinement of the writing
Length: 5 to 6 pages	Almost 6 pages (1,441 words)	See the “Thesis and Organization,” “Development and Research,” sections, please.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MLA style documentation and citation • minimum of 2 sources 	MLA style 5 sources	See the “Formatting and Citations” section, please.

Thesis & Organization

This paper shows that you understand thoroughly not only the concepts and principles of the reader-response theory of critical analysis and the dynamics of this classic American play itself but also how to apply the former to explain the latter. Brilliant analysis, really.

The thesis of the paper is clear in your own mind but articulated so as to confuse readers, most likely. In the next section, I will discuss how you might clarify this statement:

Miller explicates a strong reader response in Death of Salesman by utilizing images and dream sequences that draw us closer to an understanding of the character’s personalities which leads to a connection between the reader and the characters and the role of the American dream.

Organization of the segments of the paper does a fine job of revealing, incrementally, how it is that you perceive the play in the manner explained. No problem there at all. Very well done!

Development & Research

The research you've conducted has produced appropriate, reliable sources of information, which you have utilized advantageously to substantiate/support your own ideas. Excellent.

It is in the actual expression of those ideas that we find problems--despite the keen insight expressed in each of these statements, for example. This sort of imprecision can throw off readers who may be otherwise intrigued by your ideas. These examples illustrate the point that improper grammatical (and other) forms may directly impede reader comprehension.

By adding the concept of mystery and suspense to highlight the events that led to a climatic ending, Miller provokes stronger reader participation by infusing the dramatic effect to keep the reader guessing what makes Loman hit rock bottom.

1. The correct tense to discuss literary events and actions is present, not past.
2. Misuse of the comparative form “-er”; “stronger” than what else?
3. What, exactly, is “the dramatic effect”? You have mentioned two: “mystery” and “suspense.”

Miller explicates a strong reader response in *Death of Salesman* by utilizing images and dream sequences that draw us closer to an understanding of the character's personalities, which leads to a connection between the reader and the characters and the role of the American dream.

1. The term “explicates” isn't appropriate here. Do you mean “elicits”?
2. Is only one (“a”) “reader response” elicited by Miller?
3. Misuse of the comparative form (again)
4. Aren't you referring to the personality of more than one character? If so, it's plural possessive form that's correct, not singular possessive.
5. Does “which” relate to “sequences,” “understanding,” or “personalities”?

The author provides vibrant, detailed images of the surroundings and emotion of the setting and mood, that it is easy to set the reader in front of the stage at the theater.

1. What are “images of . . . surroundings . . . of the setting”?
2. What are “images of the . . . emotion of the . . . mood”?
3. How does the clause “that it is . . .” relate grammatically to the rest of the sentence?

Miller brings to life the past in the dream sequences, such as those of his father and brother Ben, to illuminate further the dysfunction and depression in the Loman household.

Dream sequences, such as the one about Miller's father, bring to life the past?

He believes that they are destined for greatness and his aspirations for them become a self-inflicted tragic flaw in his character.

By definition, a “tragic flaw” is one of character; presuming that humans are agents of free will, isn’t any flaw of character “self-inflicted”?

Through understanding that surfaces from these conversations, the reader elicits a conflicting appreciation for Willy’s character as they see how his expectations are high and Biff’s failure, and consequential relationship with Willy, become strained and dysfunctional.

Is this what you mean: Through understanding that surfaces from these conversations, readers develop a conflicting sense of appreciation for Willy’s character (as they see how his expectations are high) and Biff’s failure. Consequently, readers come to understand how the relationship between Willy and Biff has become strained and dysfunctional.

Biff works fervently to keep his mother safe from knowing about his father’s infidelity and subsequently looses the determination and ambition to fulfill his goals.

What’s the difference between “looses” and “loses”?

The reader is encouraged to see and feel how life has changed from earlier generations and sees how the events, by looking back through Willy’s life and the relationships he endures in the present.

Sees “how the events” do what?

This distinction is at the heart of the reader response and emphasizes the generation universal identity that can be felt by Miller’s play.

What is “generation universal identity”? Can Miller’s play really feel?

Please see these sites for help crafting clear, concise sentences:

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/transitions.htm>

<http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/concise.html>

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>

<http://wwwnew.towson.edu/ows/moduleSENTCOMB.htm>

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/ClearConciseSentences.html>

Please note that quotations, paraphrasing, and summary borrowed from source material must be integrated into your own writing; a quotation, for example, may not stand alone--grammatically unrelated to a statement of your own--because it is your own comment upon the borrowed material that makes its use in your paper clear to us. See this example:

“Unlike Willy, Benjamin—in his six decades of living—has made a name for himself, has become rich and successful, prosperous and confident... He represents everything that Willy has always dreamed of being—a robust, take-charge man, a chieftain, rugged and manly, sure of himself, fearless in all situations, be they social or financial” (Thompson 245).

This in-text citation refers to the editor of the book rather than to the author of the play; while Gwynn is mentioned in the works cited entry, no entry appears under her name. The citation should name Miller rather than Gwynn:

(Gwynn 367)

What’s wrong with the heading **WORKS CITED** and the highlighted features of each of these entries in your bibliography? See these sites for the information you need to answer this question: http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/p04_c08_o.html and <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>

Miller, Arthur. “Death of a Salesman.” 1949. *Drama: A Pocket Anthology*. 3rd ed. Ed. R. S. Gwynn. New York: Pearson Education, Inc. 2006. 340-429.

Shockley, John S. “Death of a Salesman and American leadership: Life imitate art.” *Journal of American Culture* 17 (1994): 49-57. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. U of MD U Coll. Information and Lib. Services. 1 December 2007. <<http://www.ebsco.com>>

Smith, Wendy. “Miller’s Tale: The playwright drew a line between reaching out and selling out.” *American Scholar* 74 (2005):121-125. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. U of MD U Coll. Information and Lib. Services. 1 December 2007. <<http://www.ebsco.com>>

Thompson, Terry W. “Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*.” *Explicator* 63 (2005):244-247. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. U of MD U Coll. Information and Lib. Services. 1 December 2007. <<http://www.ebsco.com>>

Tracy, Jessica L. and Robins, Richard W. “Death of a (Narcissistic) Salesman: An Integrative Model of Fragile Self-Esteem.” *Psychological Inquiry* 14 (2003): 57-63. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. U of MD U Coll. Information and Lib. Services. 1 December 2007. <<http://www.ebsco.com>>

Here, I'll comment upon some instances in the writing to help you correct points of grammar, mechanics, and other errors of similar type whenever you revise/edit. For help with points of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>.

Pronoun-antecedent disagreement:

Miller provides **the reader** with scenes that not only that allow **them** to see Willy in his desperate and unstable present, but gain insight into Willy's personality by seeing visions of his past as well as his hallucinations of those who effected him most, inspiring readers to connect to Willy's disposition and encouraging understanding of the character's actions and his downward spiral.

As an on-looker to the events, both past and present, **the reader** begins the experiences that connect **them** to the characters and story.

Through understanding that surfaces from these conversations, **the reader** elicits a conflicting appreciation for Willy's character as **they** see how his expectations are high and Biff's failure, and consequential relationship with Willy, become strained and dysfunctional.

These minor characters become resources for **the reader** to draw **their** own observations on the circumstances of Willy's life.

The events, jumping from present to past, keep **the reader**'s attention despite **their** knowledge of the likely outcome.

The conglomeration of events and observations bring **the reader** to formulate **their** own ideas on the conclusion.

Miller's observation of the tragedy of Willy's life crosses over into **the reader**'s analysis of **their** own lives.

The reader is drawn to the character as **they** learn about his dismal past and loss of family, the competitive nature of his personality, and his disillusionment with his son's failures and is denial of his own.

Reality becomes the hallmark of Miller's tale as we see the consequences of Willy's actions and **the reader** draws on Willy's experience and connects **them** to **their** own life.

The reader can bring **their** own experiences within American life to the reading of *Death of a Salesman* thereby allowing Miller to succeed in explicating a reader response that is thought provoking and profound.

Additionally, the paper needs extensive revision/editing for numerous instances of **commas** misplaced and omitted but required.

Good luck with the revision of your paper. It's truly an outstanding analysis of the play by application of a critical approach (reader-response) that many mistakenly believe to require a reader's simply stating her or his (uncritical/illogical/personal) responses--even to the point of simplistically stating whether or not she or he "likes" the work. You understand the critical aspect of the theory and the response and have proven capable of expressing both well.

Summary

As you continue your work on this project, be sure to:

1. Review the paper closely for sentences needing clarification (as my examples show).
2. Access and study the recommended sites about forms and formatting of documentation and citation of sources and about grammar, mechanics, etc., and apply information found there to your revision.
3. Edit/revise/proofread before submitting for a grade.

I hope that this advice helps you with the revision of this paper. It has been a pleasure to read the paper for you.

Writing Advisor:

Gay

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More Resources

[The Effective Writing Center](#)