**How to Write a Character Analysis**

**How to Write a Character Analysis in 10 Easy Steps**  
  
As you were reading your assigned work, you had probably been engaging in an informal character analysis without even knowing it, whether from your own opinions, text you selected to highlight, or notes that you wrote. With a little guidance on what to do with those various notations, writing a character analysis should not be a problem!   
  
**1) Pay attention to the character’s ethics.** Does the character make just or unjust choices? Consider Atticus Finch in Harper Lee’s [To Kill a Mockingbird](http://www.enotes.com/mockingbird). Atticus does not make morally correct choices only when it is convenient for him to do so. Rather, he shows he’s a truly just character by sticking to his principles even when his life is at stake.  
  
**2) Decide whether the character’s actions are wise or unwise.** For example, one may think of Friar Laurence in Shakespeare’s [Romeo and Juliet](http://www.enotes.com/romeo) as being a character who continually makes poor decisions that reflect his inner corruption.   
  
**3) What is the character’s motivation?** As you are mulling over the pros and cons of each character’s internal thoughts and external actions, you will want to also consider why the character is acting or thinking in a particular way. Has the author given you any clues about the character’s past? In Amy Tan’s novel [The Joy Luck Club](http://www.enotes.com/joy-luck), Lindo Jong’s domination of her daughter Waverly can be understood, if not entirely excused, by her terrible experiences in China.  
  
**4) Consider the effects of the character’s behavior on other characters.** Jane Austen’s [Pride and Prejudice](http://www.enotes.com/pride) is rife with the effects of one character’s actions on others. When Lydia decides to run off with the charlatan Wickham, she puts the whole family’s reputation, as well has her own, at risk, and even involves those outside her family, like Darcy.  
  
**5) Look for repeatedly used words that describe the character.** Those words often give insight into a character’s psychology and motivations. In John Steinbeck’s novel [East of Eden](http://www.enotes.com/east-eden), Kathy is frequently referred to as having “sharp little teeth” and a “flickering tongue,” which are symbols of her snake-like monstrousness.  
  
**6) Be aware of items associated with the character.** They may say something about his or her state of mind. A classic example is the delicate unicorn figurine in Tennessee Williams’ play [The Glass Menagerie](http://www.enotes.com/glass-menagerie). The figurine is symbolic of Laura’s own sense of hope and her own fragility.   
  
**7) Read between the lines.** Often what a character does not say is as important as what he or she does say. Think of Abner Snopes in William Faulkner’s short story [“Barn Burning.”](http://www.enotes.com/barn-burning) When the court finds Snopes guilty of ruining his boss’ rug, prior knowledge of Abner’s character tells us that his silence upon hearing the verdict actually speaks volumes. We know he will react later...and violently.  
  
**8) Is the character “flat” or “round”?** A character is considered flat (or static) when he or she does not experience change of any kind, does not grow from beginning to end. Shakespeare often uses comic villains as flat characters, like Don Jon in [Much Ado About Nothing](http://www.enotes.com/muchado). Round characters are those who do experience some sort of growth, like Nora in Henrik Ibsen’s [A Doll’s House](http://www.enotes.com/dollshouse). By the end of the play, she has gone from being meek and submissive to being strong and liberated.  
  
**9) Consider the historical time period of the character.** Refrain from making modern judgments about the past; put the character’s actions and thoughts in context. A female character living in England in the 1800s obviously could not make the choices that she could today, for both political and social reasons.  
  
**10) Finally, what does the author think?** Look for any of the author’s own judgments about the characters he or she has created. The author may be directing you toward an intended interpretation. In [The Scarlet Letter](http://www.enotes.com/scarlet), Nathaniel Hawthorne certainly meant for his readers to see Hester as good and Chillingsworth as evil.

* The final aspect of this assignment is how the character looks like!