# **Guide to the Critical Lens Essay | QC Writing Center**

**What is a critical lens?**A critical lens is a particular viewpoint you should look through as you analyze a text, focusing on style choices, plot devices, and character interactions and how they show a certain theme.

The critical lens could be a "Marxist" or "feminist" one, for example. Talk to your professor or do additional research on the critical lens you choose, if necessary.

**What is the purpose of a critical lens essay?**   
The critical lens reveals something about the original text that may not be apparent otherwise or somehow provokes a reevaluation of it. By supporting your analysis with outside sources, the essay generates a critical dialogue between texts.

**Crafting a critical lens essay:**

1. **Understand the critical lens.**Try reading some example essays which apply the same critical lens to other texts.
2. **Use that particular lens to analyze your text.**As you (re)read, highlight passages that connect to or support the critical lens. For example: Josh Chan is writing a paper using psychoanalysis as his critical lens. Therefore, he’s highlighting passages about father-son relationships that he could later expound upon to illuminate an Oedipal theme present in the text.
3. **Craft an ORIGINAL thesis statement.**Remember, the overall argument you present should be supported by direct quotes from the text. It should be clear in your thesis what the critical lens allows readers to see or understand about the text.
4. **Draw examples from the text that support your thesis.**These examples will help build out your body paragraphs.
5. **Draw on at least 2 outside works of literary criticism or autobiography/biography to support your thesis.**   
   You’ll cite 3 works total in your essay and in an attached Works Cited page: the original text as well as at least 2 outside sources!

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| CRITICAL LENS | DESCRIPTION |
| Historical | Examines the work in context of the time in which it was written *or* in the context of  current norms and values |
| Critical Race Theory | Examines what the work indicates about race |
| Feminist Theory | Examines what the work indicates about gender |
| Marxist Theory | Examines what the work indicates about power relationships or class |
| There are plenty of other lenses which draw from queer theory, narrative theory, ecotheory, deconstructionism, postcolonialism, and more. |  |