

Preparing a Response to Critical Contexts

Follow these basic steps:

1. Read each critical piece carefully and keep close track of all the things with which you agree and (even more important) disagree.
2. Look specifically for information and fact that are new to you; examine and question the information carefully.
3. Look for points of disagreement among the critics, make a list of the most important issues raised, and look for the parts of the poem over which disagreements occur.
4. Once you have prepared your notes and absorbed some of the criticism, how do you participate in the debate about the poem?
5. Your essay could show that others have overlooked or misinterpreted something significant. Note the sources the critics cite. Which articles or works by or about the poem's author appear? Find in your library or on the Internet a copy of the cited sources and read and interpret them in your own way.
6. Your essay could be an overview of critical trends in the study of this poem, making clear which positions you find helpful and where your own critical position differs from others.
7. In one or two sentences write a thesis statement expressing your views on various critical approaches.