

Why? and How? Revision

As we have been marking Assignments, it has come to my attention that many students try to answer the questions of **Why?** and **How?** separately, which is far from the most effective way of structuring an analysis. Always remember, when you write an essay analysing a text, you need to *think of your essay as a single answer*. The **last thing** you want to do is **isolate different parts of your answer** from one another, so you need to look for ways to **present your analysis as a coherent whole**.

Basically, what this means is that you need to use **How** the text has been written to explain **Why** the text has been written. In more direct terms, every time you examine a **literary technique, poetic device or conversational element**, you need to try and figure out **how it helps you to understand why the text was written and explain that in your essay**.

Here's a simple example, taken from a previous assignment:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

(Chapter 1, Pride and Prejudice)

When I ask myself **Why** this passage was written, I can see that it was written as a satirical commentary on the need to marry for wealth and class in the author's society.

When I look at **How** this passage was written, I can see that it employs irony, as the second sentence subverts the meaning of the first sentence by implying that a single, wealthy man *may not* be in search of a wife, but that this fact is irrelevant to the families of the neighbourhood with eligible daughters.

Each of these points stands well on its own, but they can be combined to make a much more meaningful point, like so:

In the above passage, the author uses irony by having the second sentence subvert the meaning of the first sentence by implying that a single, wealthy man *may not* be in search of a wife, but that this fact is irrelevant to the families of the neighbourhood with eligible daughters. This single ironic

passage elegantly conveys the author's opinion that women should not need to marry for wealth and status, by satirising and subverting the common practices of the author's society.

By combining these two individual points, I have used my analysis of **How** the passage was written to help me explain **Why** the passage was written. You should try to do this throughout your entire essay.

Please note: While I have focused on **Why?** and **How?** here, the same basic principle holds true when you look at the **other questions** discussed in Study Unit 01. I have simply chosen to focus on this particular relationship, because it seems to be the one students struggle with the most.