

Academics - LITERARY CRITICISM CONTEST

Mark Bernier, State Contest Director
mbernier@blinn.edu

Contest Rules

The rules for all UIL Academic contests are found in the *UIL Constitution and Contest Rules (C&CR)*, which can be found online. Students and coaches new to Literary Criticism should become familiar with the rules found in Section 940 of the *C&CR* online.

The **UIL Literary Criticism Contest** is a ninety-minute contest in which the competitor's familiarity with the concepts associated with literary analysis and the authors and works that represent English-language literary history is assessed.

Three sets of questions comprise the scored part of the test; a *required* tie-breaking essay that invites the competitor to exercise his or her skill in literary analysis completes the test.

Part 1: Knowledge of Literary Terms and Literary History (30 one-point questions)

Part 2: The UIL Reading List--*differs year to year* (20 two-point questions)

Part 3: Ability in Literary Criticism (15 two-point questions)

Part 4: The Tie-Breaking Prompt

Part 1: Knowledge of Literary Terms and Literary History

The first part of the test, a bank of thirty multiple-choice questions, is drawn from the Harmon-Holman *Handbook to Literature 9e*. While the *Handbook* is fairly exhaustive in its coverage of literary terms and literary history fundamental to the study of the western literary canon, the thirty questions cover the terms etc. most likely encountered in a serious approach to the wide range of literary concepts, literary works, and critical approaches that characterize western, especially British and American, literary history.

The main part of the *Handbook* is an alphabetically listed set of definitions and descriptors; from these definitions and descriptors are drawn roughly ten to twelve questions.

Among the *Handbook's* appendices are lists of the recipients of the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama; from these lists are pulled upwards of eight questions.

The remainder of the questions constituting the first section, numbering eight to ten items, test the competitor's knowledge of literary history. These questions assess the competitor's familiarity with the chronologies of both the British and the American literary canons as offered by the *Handbook* in both its multipage chronology and in its brief discussions of literary movements, literary groups, and critical approaches to the study of literature.

Part 2: The UIL Reading List (differs year to year)

The reading list has traditionally consisted of a novel, a drama, and a selection of poems—though from time to time a set of representative short stories has replaced the novel on the list.

The 2012-2013 list includes Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (Rolf Fjelde, trans.) and a selection of Emily Dickinson's poetry. (See reading list.)

Twenty questions, fairly evenly divided, test the competitor's familiarity with the events, the major thematic concerns, the characterization, and, in the case of the poetry, the poetic technique for which the works are noted. Interpretation as a testable consideration is minimized, if for no other reason than to forestall any ambiguity---the questions are multiple choice. Historical context as dictated by the themes and the plotlines should be considered eligible. Literary biography, unless it is thematic to the literature under investigation, while important, will not be tested.

Part 3: Ability in Literary Criticism

The final fifteen questions assess the competitor's ability in literary criticism. Upwards of five selections, *in toto* or excerpted, are provided for analysis. Three to four questions, usually, ask the competitor to recognize or understand the literature, using the analytical tools represented by the concepts that are covered in the *Handbook* and that are often exercised in analysis and discussion of literature to depth often accomplished in the review of the literature listed on the UIL Reading List (see part 2).

Part 4: The Tie-Breaking Prompt

The directions provided for the tie-breaking prompt suffice:

Contestants who do not write an essay will be disqualified even if they are not involved in any tie.

Essays that do not demonstrate a sincere effort to discuss the assigned topic will be disqualified. The judge(s) should note carefully this criterion when breaking ties: ranking of essays for tie-breaking purposes should be based primarily on how well the topic has been addressed.

Three pages of blank paper have been provided for this essay; however, it is not expected that the essay will be longer than 150 words.