

Academics — LITERARY CRITICISM CONTEST

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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 items comprise the scored part of the test; a *required* tiebreaking 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 items)
- Part 2: The UIL Reading List--*differs year to year* (20 two-point items)
- Part 3: Ability in Literary Criticism (15 two-point items)
- Part 4: The Tiebreaking Prompt

Part 1: Knowledge of Literary Terms and Literary History

The first part of the test, a bank of thirty multiple-choice items, is drawn from the Harmon-Holman *Handbook to Literature* 12e. 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 items 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 of figures of speech, tropes, schemes, and genres; from these definitions and descriptors are drawn roughly eleven items.

Among the *Handbook's* (12e) appendices are four **not-up-to-date** 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 four items. Please note that the Nobel and Pulitzer literature eligibility includes recipients up to and including 2023, which means that the Nobel and Pulitzer websites become the authorities for years 2011-2023. Please see the Literary Criticism Reading List for web addresses.

New for 2023-2024: The contestant will not be responsible for these lists *in toto*; contestant responsibility for the lists is divided among the five UIL Literary Criticism tests; the eligible recipient years are listed on the Reading List.

The remainder of the items constituting the first section test the competitor's knowledge of literary history. These items 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 relatively brief discussions of literary movements, literary groups, and period-specific genres, as well as critical approaches to the understanding 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 2023-2024 list includes George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, and a representative selection of William Butler Yeats's poetry.

Twenty items, 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 items 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 items assess the competitor's ability to apply the skills of literary analysis to works (*in toto* or excerpted) that the competitor has not likely encountered. The competitor is asked to answer questions, using the analytical tools represented by the concepts that are covered in the *Handbook*, including, especially, concepts used in the analysis and discussion of the literature listed on the UIL Reading List (see Part 2 above).

Part 4: The Tiebreaking Prompt

The directions provided for the tiebreaking 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 tiebreaking purposes should be based primarily on how well the topic has been addressed.

Three pages of **lined** paper are provided for this essay.