

Essay #4: Critical Analysis of *White Noise*

Page Range: 5 – 7 pages, not including the works cited page

Objective: Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) is a postmodern novel that is critiquing the modern American culture by connecting consumerism to identity and at the center of it all is death. For this assignment, we will research and analyze the novel determining its literary importance using multiple sources.

Prompt: For this essay, identify some of the observations/criticisms Don DeLillo is making in his novel *White Noise* about society in the 1980s and how these observations are still applicable to us today.

Outside sources: To support your ideas, you will use:

1. concrete examples from the novel by directly citing key passages
2. 3 scholarly articles that offer an analysis on DeLillo's *White Noise* you have found on the library's database—do not use book reviews—to support your analysis
3. as an option, you may also include additional articles that speak to pop culture either from our textbook or from periodicals found on the library databases or in the library.
4. Do not use google to research for articles on White Noise.
5. Do not use Wikipedia, blogs, or other questionable sources not considered to be an academic source.

Directions: This essay will follow the general structure of an introduction with a clearly stated thesis statement, body, and conclusion. When citing the authors from the textbook, be sure to adequately introduce the text(s) you will be using to support your points by author's full name, title of work (either in italics for long works or in quotes for short works) and a brief summary of the text as it relates to the quoted passage. Use proper in-text citations for textual support and format the essay using MLA guidelines and include a works cited page for all borrowed material.

Structure of your essay: This essay will move beyond a 5-paragraph model. To make a cohesive and complicated argument, pick one main criticism you see this novel making about our American culture (in the 1980s). Once you identify that main criticism, then you will break down different observations DeLillo is making about that criticism in multiple (more than 3) body paragraphs. Each of these paragraphs will build upon the ideas explored in the previous paragraph to create a unified argument. Moreover, as the essay draws near to its end, extend on the criticism DeLillo is making to show how it is applicable to our society today. This could be in a paragraph or two before you conclude. As you can see, this essay will be more than 5 total paragraphs.

Analyzing Literature: Analyzing literature can be similar to analyzing a non-fiction text. As you point out specific instances in the novel to show *how* DeLillo is criticizing the American culture, here are some literary techniques you can explore in your essay:

1. **Narrative style** is the way the authors write their stories, such as being told in first-person, the postmodern elements, juxtaposing one person in the story against the other to highlight the differences of something, the arrangement of sentences/ syntax/paragraphs, and/or the structure of the narrative (such as chapter 21 being one long chapter compared to the shorter chapters), repetition of an idea to emphasize a point, and so on.
2. **Use of symbolism** is when one thing is used to represent another in the story. Symbolism is usually connected to the theme to highlight something significant about the topic/theme being explored. Common types of symbolism are weather (spring = rebirth, winter = death), colors (black and white), locations (supermarket or college), objects in room (TV or radio), and even historical figures (Elvis or Hitler). Look for anything described in the narrative that the author draws the reader's attention to. Next, look for how it is described in relation to the main character and the conflict in the story.
3. **Use of figurative language**, such as simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia (words sound like what they denote, such as *tap*, *cough*, *boom*), or allusions, go beyond the literal meanings to give readers new insight.
4. **Descriptive details** touch on as many, if not all, of the five senses and create a vivid image for the reader to help them gain insight on the experiences of the people in the story. Look for how the details in the story are being described. How do readers feel based on this description? How do readers think differently about the topic/theme (popular culture, death, family, etc.) or the characters (Jack, Murray, Babette)?
5. **Setting** can include weather, location where the scene takes place, buildings, the outside environment, and objects in the room. Setting can be significant and take on symbolic meanings that go beyond the literal, giving insight into the story's themes and main criticism.
6. **Use of meta-narrative** to illustrate an authorial voice about the theme(s) being explored. These could be inserted in obscure places, such as at the end of the chapter or as a thought by a character or a musing made by the main character, Jack. These passages will touch on what DeLillo hopes his readers will understand or come to know about the criticism he is making in the novel. See chapter 3, the second paragraph for an example of a meta-narrative: "... to decipher the natural language of the culture" (DeLillo 9). Here, DeLillo is using the New York émigrés to show what DeLillo is doing in this novel: trying to decipher the natural language of the American culture during the 1980s (and possibly showing what our future holds).
7. The **conclusion** gets at the heart of the argument and determines what the author wants readers to think by the end of the story. Did the story end on a positive note or a tragic one? For instance, the ending of *White Noise* is set at the supermarket: what argument is the story presenting based on its conclusion?

Grading Rubric: Grades will be based on the amount of effort you put into a project and not solely based on one's natural gifts or talents as a writer or a speaker. By using the checklist on the back of this page, you have the greatest potential to earn full credit if you do the following:

Targets to Be Met	Yes	Somewhat	No
Assignment Deadline	+10% (+15 points): turn in the assignment by the due date in a readable file format (e.g. Word or PDF)		-10% (-15 points): turned in assignment past the deadline
Assignment Page Count	+10% (+15 points): be within the page range as specified on the assignment	+5% (+8 points): within ½ page	-10% (-15 points): outside page range by over a ½ page
Introduction and Conclusion	+10% (+15 points): introduce the topic/issue in the introduction while logically guiding the reader toward the thesis; and conclusion restates the main idea, to show the importance of the topic/issue	+5% (+8 points): underdeveloped introduction or conclusion; topic and problem not fully introduced, or introduction doesn't logically arrive at the thesis	-10% (-15 points): ineffective or missing introduction or conclusion to serve the narrative purposes for this assignment
Thesis Statement	+10% (+15 points): include a clearly stated thesis in the introduction, preferably toward the end of the paragraph, that addresses the underlined sentence in the essay's proposition	+5% (+8 points): thesis is implied or doesn't present a clear argument; or the thesis is stated as statement of intent (e.g. I will argue . . .)	-10% (-15 points): no clear thesis present or thesis doesn't show an argument
Developed Body Paragraphs	+10% (+15 points): include developed body paragraphs using textual evidence (i.e. direct quotes) and explanation that provide sufficient support for your thesis statement; analysis is reasonable and credibly developed	+5% (+8 points): analysis simplistic, repetitive, or underdeveloped; textual support referenced, not directly cited in some cases; examples and details ill-chosen or little explanation provided	-10% (-15 points): body paragraphs are not developed enough to show support for the thesis
Clear Writing	+10% (+15 points): present a clear and cohesive argument. This includes clearly articulating your points throughout the essay and logically connecting your points so that the argument is cohesive and coherent. Note: Awkward syntax and incorrect grammar can impede the clarity of your ideas	+5% (+8 points): pockets of clarity due to difficulties with syntax/diction/grammar; logical connections present yet mechanical	-10% (-15 points): grammatical/syntactical errors very distracting and argument as a whole is difficult to follow
Assignment Objective	+20% (30 points): meet the essay's objective as directed on the prompt by addressing the underlined sentence in the essay prompt; structure is clear and logical to build a cohesive argument	+10% (+15 points): argument insufficiently addressed in areas; structure and logic unravel with no clear connections between points	-20% (-30 points): argument doesn't follow what is being asked on the prompt; ideas in random order that makes it difficult to follow the argument/logic

Sources	+10% (+15 points): incorporate the required type and number of sources based on the prompt's directions	+5% (+8 points): used at least half of the sources required; include required sources, but are not directly supporting the argument	-10% (-15 points): little to no sources used
MLA Formatting and Citation	+10% (+15 points): include proper MLA formatting and citation guidelines. This includes choosing appropriate quotes, integrating them correctly and effectively, and properly formatting works cited entries on a works cited page	+5% (+8 points): minor formatting or citation errors: quotes dropped in or not adequately followed up to show support; works cited page has some errors, such as punctuation, titles not in quotes or italicized (based on the type of source), and not listing sources alphabetically	-10% (-15 points): major formatting and citation errors present: quotes missing around passages cited from texts, parenthetical citation missing, quotes dropped in without parenthetical to show author's name, works cited page not cited properly, such as information missing from citation