

3 **How to Carry Out Academic Research that Examines the Representation of Male Violence in Works of Literature**

Summary 3.1 Situated Reading. – 3.2 Gender Perspective. – 3.3 State of the Art. – 3.4 The Research Question: What Do You Want Your Analysis to Show?. – 3.5 Justifying Your Choice of Work or Corpus. – 3.6 Analytical Reading. – 3.7 Theoretical Framework: Concepts and Terminology. – 3.8 Literary Interpretation. – 3.9 Conclusions. – 3.10 Final Review. – 3.11 List of Good Practices. – 3.12 References.

In this section we present a detailed practical guide to the steps you should follow when designing and carrying out research on how male violence is represented in literary texts.

This research should be based on **five core principles**:

- You will undertake a **learning process** that should provide you with **knowledge** and should broaden your ability to **reflect critically**, from **emancipatory perspectives**, on literature, on the world and on yourself.
- You will approach the work neither as an ordinary reader nor as a reviewer. Instead, you will engage in a **critical analysis** that should train you to ask **relevant, new and challenging questions** related to violence against women.
- You will avoid merely describing the instances of violence that the work makes most explicit. You want to **interpret** those that remain latent and that you have been able to identify and confront using **arguments based on textual evidence**.
- Applying the analytical framework of violence against women should allow you to **broaden and deepen the interpretative horizon** of the work. Do not fall into the trap of one-way, schematic and mechanical readings of the work that do not consider the literary nature of the text above all else. For the analysis you should take into account the elements of literary discourse, from language and rhetoric to plot, characters and the conventions of each genre (poetry, drama, novels, comics, etc.).
- You will write a text aimed at the **academic community** to share the conclusions you have reached through the practice of **resistant reading**. You want to contribute new knowledge about the work by **problematising canonical imaginaries** and **subverting androcentric interpretative parameters and patriarchal values**. You aspire to highlight the **power of literature to transform existing imaginaries and create new ones**.

You will need to keep these principles in mind throughout the entire research process, from conception to analysis and conclusion-drawing.

There are also two key points to bear in mind. First, use inclusive language and be consistent in this respect.¹ Second, your work is about the **representation of violence**. As you know, the word ‘represent’ has a **double meaning**. It can refer either to the way in which an idea, phenomenon, attitude or other concept takes shape, is embodied and acquires a symbolic dimension, or to the action of ‘speaking on behalf of someone’. In both cases, critical analysis has ethical implications. Regardless of the meaning, it calls for questions such as “With what legitimacy does the author or narrative voice portray the violence suffered or committed by a historical figure or group in the past or

¹ One valid option, for example, is to use the pronoun ‘they’ (or its inflected forms their, them and themselves) to refer to a person whose gender is unknown or not of concern, as we do in this guide. You can also deploy other language strategies to avoid gendered pronouns and terms, such as ‘policeman’ or ‘chairman’.

present?”, “How are fact and fiction combined in the account of a witness or in a historical memoir?”, and “Is the representation of bodies and emotions being used as a tool to achieve greater dramatic effect?”

If you take all the above questions into consideration from the start of your research, you will undertake the interpretative challenge with greater insight and confidence.

3.1 Situated Reading

Before explaining the steps you should follow to write a good paper or essay on a literary work, we would like to share a reflection with you. You have to let go of the belief that there is such a thing as objective knowledge, especially in the humanities. Every academic or research activity is marked by the subjectivity of the people who carry it out. This, it must be said, is neither a drawback nor a point of weakness. Being mindful of your own place of enunciation when exploring ideas and arguments can help you to engage in more honest, well-rounded dialogue with them. This could include dimensions such as gender, class and ethnicity. Our personal journeys are inextricably linked to our academic work; however, we should not feel that we are negatively conditioned by them, nor should we wield them as a value in and of themselves.

Recognising one’s subjectivity has recently been welcomed as a way to better understand how and from where analyses are made and arguments constructed. This is what is known as **situated research**. It generally involves the author briefly stating their position at the beginning of the research paper or essay. You state, in a frank and self-reflective way, where you are speaking from and what your own experiences have been. This can help readers to appreciate that you may be more sensitive to certain issues or more acute in perceiving certain conditions of oppression or privilege. Some even share or draw on autobiographical details that intersect with the subject they are dealing with.² In literary research, it is a matter of explicitly stating that you are carrying out **situated reading**.

Our recommendation is to consider it **optional** to address your subjectivity directly. If you do not state your position, it will still inevitably be reflected in the arguments you make. The most straightforward way of conveying this is to use the **grammatical person ‘I’** rather than the traditional plural form ‘we’ or impersonal constructions. However, if you find it meaningful and relevant, be forthright.

² This is done, for example, by University of Chicago professor Martha C. Nussbaum in the preface to her essay *Citadels of Pride. Sexual Assault, Accountability, and Reconciliation* (2022), when she notes that she herself has been a victim of sexual harassment and assault.

3.2 Gender Perspective

Always remember to apply a gender perspective when researching and reviewing academic literature, when carefully reading literary texts and when analysing contextual aspects that may provide deeper insight into them (conditions in which they were written and published, the time period, whether they belong to a literary and language context, etc.). The **gender perspective** is a **conceptual framework** – owing itself to **feminist criticism** – through which to interpret and understand the world and its conflicts. This framework, which places gender at the centre of critical interpretation, allows us to connect multiple issues, establish causal relationships of oppressive situations and conditions, and detect underlying ideologies and pillars of inequality and injustice that would otherwise go unnoticed or not be fully understood in all their complexity and nuance.

Hence, we consider the gender perspective **revealing**, because it brings out what would otherwise remain hidden if we were to follow canonical or prescriptive reading patterns, and **enlightening**, because it provides insight and keys to understanding structures and dynamics related to oppression, which are those that create and perpetuate violence against women. Identifying these oppressions, moreover, prevents us from exceptionalising them, i.e. saying that they are *isolated cases* instead of reading them for what they are: representations of a system of male dominance that generates, permits, legitimises, normalises, reproduces and perpetuates them. Searching for and interpreting these forms of violence in literature allows us to expose them and raise awareness. Most importantly, however, it allows us to understand them so that we can develop methods for their prevention and elimination. We also recommend applying this gender perspective through the lens of **intersectionality** (Crenshaw 1989); that is, observing in your study the interaction of various dimensions of oppression, dominance and discrimination, such as gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, (dis)ability and place of origin.³

3.3 State of the Art

At the earliest stage of your research, you should **read the academic literature and take notes**. Look carefully at the issues that have been addressed by studies on the work and its author. Only then will you be able to complete a fundamental part of any paper or essay: the **state of the art**. This is a very concise and critical account of *who* has studied *what*. This approach will allow you to identify aspects

³ For more on this, see the term ‘intersectionality’ in the glossary.

that you can argue are relevant and have not yet been addressed. Alternatively, if you come across an aspect that has been dealt with in a way that you do not find convincing, you can provide a new perspective to counter the arguments. If you want to write an **original** literary essay, you should either examine an **unexplored issue** or open up **new paradigms or controversies** in the ongoing debate about the work.

If the work you want to analyse is very recent, there will almost certainly be no published studies critically addressing it. Even if you read literature on the author, the subject matter or the cultural and literary context to better equip yourself for the analysis, the challenge will still be great: you are about to take on the responsibility of initiating academic debate on the work. In this case, you must emphasise the value of doing so. By taking this risk you may make a pioneering and particularly remarkable contribution to literary studies. If the work you are studying is not recent and yet you cannot find any academic texts on it, it may not be worthy of scholarly study. Consider whether the absence of academic literature on a work is a reason for discarding it as an object of study or, on the contrary, for dedicating your research to it.

3.4 The Research Question: What Do You Want Your Analysis to Show?

After reading a given work and exploring the academic literature around it, you need to determine the goal of your essay, the spark, the issue, the focal point. In other words, you need to decide what you want to talk about, because you think it is problematic, relevant, pertinent and original **not only for you**, but also **for other readers**. Whatever the case, you will need to elaborate on the reasons for this concern or interest. It may also be a doubt that you want to elucidate through analysis, an unknown that you hope to answer by means of interpretative work, or a hypothesis that you aim to test or refute. All of this needs to be fleshed out in what we call the **research question** (RQ). The RQ is the crux of the matter, the reason that justifies an analysis, the foundation on which you will build your interpretative discourse. If you want to write a **cohesive and convincing literary essay**, you must articulate your arguments around this RQ. This is why it is so important to formulate a good RQ at the initial stage of your research.

At the start of any research, choosing a RQ may seem difficult. After initially reading the work and going through the academic literature, you may still have only a vague idea of what you want to do. This point of uncertainty is very common at the beginning of any endeavour. Look at it as an opportunity: it opens you up to what the

literary texts say and what the interpretative and theoretical studies argue. Just make sure to remain critical. This will make it easier for you to compare and contrast a wide range of possible reading approaches with an open mind.

The RQ will take shape as you read the relevant academic literature and throughout the analysis process, and you will likely have to fine-tune it. When reformulating your RQ, try to **strengthen its incisive potential** and **make it clearer**. As you reread and take notes, you will gradually identify the substance of your essay. Keep in mind that the RQ should not change completely, however, because that would mean starting back at square one.

This uncertainty influences many to propose RQ that are too broad and fail to address a specific topic that would allow them to meaningfully explore the literary text: “violence against women in the nineteenth century”, “the oppression of women in Catalonia”, “sexual assault in troubadour literature”... Careful! Approaches such as these will lead you into the main pitfall of research: **superficiality**. Academic works must have a **well-defined field of analysis**, and the RQ must therefore be equally **precise**. However, we must not take this too far. We are not looking for RQ that are too narrow or reductionist, along the lines of “how the colours of the hats in *Madame Bovary* represent gender conditions”. Instead, we must strike a balance between ambition and banality, irrelevance or frivolity.

How is this balance achieved? It is a matter of combining **deductive** and **inductive** attitudes: *listen* to the object of study (in your case, read the literary text very carefully) to find the exact points that allow you to support your arguments and, thus, to identify what you need to flesh out your RQ. You can use prompts such as: “Is this issue relevant, problematic and significant enough?”, “Why this one and not another?”, “What is special about it?”, “Is it content-related, form-related or both?” If you maintain this attitude throughout your research, you will gain confidence as you more concisely narrow the scope of your essay. By way of example, the following might be **suitable research questions**:

- In what way does the work’s treatment of violence against women challenge the ideology of progress?
- What wounds and traumas do the survivors have, how are they expressed and how are they (or are they not) overcome?
- In what way does an intersectional, anti-racist and/or decolonial perspective enable a deeper understanding of the violence against women in this work?
- Does the work reinforce or challenge the ideology that women primarily find fulfilment in motherhood?
- Does the text promote the ideology of women abandoning their vulnerable and oppressed status to become empowered in terms of neoliberal entrepreneurship?

- What vision of an emancipatory future free of violence against women does the work propose?
- When relating the pain of others, does the text appropriate it to articulate the discourse of a saviour or opportunist or, on the contrary, does it treat it respectfully, with a desire to promote reparation and human rights?

3.5 Justifying Your Choice of Work or Corpus

Justifying one's choice of corpus is an essential step that is sometimes wrongly avoided or dealt with in one fell swoop, using personal preference as the only argument. There is, of course, a component of subjectivity in every choice. However, this is not enough to convince the readers of your work that a particular literary text deserves to be the central focus of your reflection, and that it is particularly well-suited for exploring your chosen RQ. Long story short, **you need to justify your choice**. It is important to argue that it is the result of careful reflection on **why it is worth critically reading this text** and not another. This does not mean aiming for arguments of exclusivity: you should not obsess over proving that your choice is the only one possible. The justification process seeks to demonstrate the adequacy and appropriateness of your corpus with respect to the RQ, i.e. why reading this work (or these works) is the best way to understand what you want to study.

Every RQ has a specific set of justification needs. In the case at hand, you want to look at how literature represents violence against women. This theme can come through in the plot. Therefore, showing the relationship between your RQ and the work's plot is the first step towards justifying your choice.

After you have established this relationship, even if only superficially, you will have to face an inescapable and rather difficult task. It is not enough to point out that a work's plot depicts situations of violence against women. You have to go further and dig deep into the text to identify **what specifically and uniquely** makes the work **a legitimate and relevant case study**. To accomplish this, we suggest asking the following questions:

***The 'how':** how does the literary work portray violence against women?*

You can interpret this **'how'** in two ways. The first is to focus on the **literary devices** used by the author that you believe reveal, in a meaningful and effective way, the patriarchal dynamics and ideologies that perpetuate oppressions against women. You will need to look, for example, at the use of certain rhetorical devices, the choice

of specific narrative voices, or the combination of diegetic time and space. Focusing on this more formalist ‘how’ implies treating the literary work as important because of the form in which it is written. Therefore, you will have to build the argument for your interpretative choice on these criteria.

The second way to interpret this question is by looking at **how the theme is dealt with**. This entails exploring whether the work presents a situation of violence against women in a sufficiently innovative or unique way. You will need to pay attention, for example, to what it might mean if the violence a woman suffers at the hands of her husband is presented from the perspective of a female neighbour or from the perspective of the aggressor or perpetrator. Although the theme and the RQ will be the same as in other works, it is this perspective and the way in which it is treated that gives the literary text originality and, therefore, makes it conducive to a particular and relevant reflection.

The ‘who’: who suffers or commits violence against women?

Another way of justifying your choice of text is by emphasising **who** the subjects represented as **victims** or **survivors** of this violence are. In this case, you will explore how these subjects are situated in a **relationship of subalternity with respect to the dominant or privileged characters** (those who create dynamics of oppression) because they possess certain identity traits and are traversed by various conditions – social status, gender, place of origin, ethnicity, culture, language, age, etc. This model of justification can be very useful if you want to deal with works that present subjects who have traditionally been disregarded by patriarchal and Eurocentric views, such as LGBTQI+ people or those at risk of social exclusion for reasons of class, ethnicity, place of origin or (dis)ability, which, it must be said, often overlap. In connection to the expansion of the values inherent to human rights, a growing body of literary works appearing in recent decades has sought to give these people a voice and bring their experiences to light. This means that you have a very wide range of works available featuring subaltern characters. A critical analysis can be justified precisely because it attempts to **examine their circumstances** and, thus, understand the **heterogeneous, complex and mobile nature of the universe of victims and survivors**. In this way, you will play a part in **questioning stereotypes and truisms**. You should also draw attention to how their subordination as women intersects with other factors of discrimination or violence. In doing so, your analysis of the characters will enable you to better grasp the complex **web of oppressions** and how they intersect with **ideologies that underpin inequalities and injustices**.

Another way of using the ‘who’ is to focus your analysis on the **aggressor** or **perpetrator**. This involves studying the subjects that commit acts of violence. Now, if you choose this option, you should not merely observe how they behave in the text, make a simple list of the acts of violence they carry out and catalogue them by type (sexual abuse, psychological violence, etc.). While this may be appropriate for a school project, it is too superficial and thus insufficient for academic analysis. You run the risk of stating the obvious for any reader. You will need to go further, to engage your theoretical knowledge and critical mind in order to show whether the text explicitly portrays or, on the contrary, normalises the **system of privileges** that fosters (and perhaps even legitimises) attitudes, practices and social systems, as well as concrete actions of oppression and violence that may not only go unpunished at times, but also entirely unnoticed and therefore unchallenged.

However, we would like to make an important caveat: **avoid** approaching your analysis from a **dichotomous binarism** that inclines you to simplistically and systematically identify the characters purely as aggressors or tormentors and victims or survivors – if this is not the case in the text. Literary works have the unique ability to show that there are no rigid or monolithic categories: a character – like a person in real life – can be both an aggressor and a survivor. Their condition can also change over the course of the diegesis. We must avoid the mistake of systematically presenting women as ‘complete victims’ or doing so from paternalistic positions or romanticising and condescending essentialisms. To do so is to take away their agency and, therefore, to reproduce patriarchal discourses that conceive of women as weak, passive and naturally prone to victimhood.

The ‘when’: in what time is the violence against women set?

The ‘when’ directs your attention to the historical period of the work. Like the ‘how’, it also has two possible readings – which in some cases may line up. The first, and perhaps more obvious, refers to the **literary recreation of the diegetic point in history**. That is, the historical period of the extratextual world in which the fiction’s action and plot are set. If you can justify that there is little written about situations of violence against women in a given historical context (or that what is written is of poor quality), you can make a case for studying a particular literary work in order to broaden our knowledge. However, you must tread carefully, because literature is not always a reliable historical source, nor can we draw firm sociological conclusions from literary studies.

The second reading of this question has to do with **when the literary text was written and/or published**. That is, when it first saw the light of day in its original language (not in later editions or

translations, although this aspect of a text's circulation can also be quite meaningful). Literary studies carried out from a gender perspective are redefining our relationship to the literary canon in two main ways. The first has to do with **rereading the canon itself**: we apply contemporary perspectives to works from other times, not to judge them for what they could have been, but to **reveal dynamics of oppression** that were otherwise buried or considered irrelevant. Novels, characters or authors are re-examined through a **feminist lens** to expose, on the one hand, situations of male chauvinism previously normalised by the canon's patriarchal authority, and on the other, to uncover new readings only possible thanks to the gender perspective. The second way involves rescuing works that have been overlooked and made invisible by the system of literary authorities, often because they were written by women. The gender perspective invites us to **re-evaluate works** that have otherwise been ignored by the canon; this is another good way of justifying your choice.

In the process of justifying a work, you will have to deal with another important issue: **representativeness**. Keep in mind that **no literary work** (and therefore no critical study) **is fully representative of a conflict**. So, you cannot aspire to equate interpreting a work with understanding the totality of the problem you are studying. Knowing this should not come as discouragement: on the contrary, it is only with the certainty of having been able to analyse something specific that you can hope to better understand the general issue or problem.

In this endeavour, one way to strengthen your arguments is through **comparative literature**. The same process described for justifying one work can also be used if your case study draws on **two or more works**: your reflections on the 'how', 'who' and 'when' multiply and intersect and are therefore consolidated. Making a comparative study, at the same time, allows you to ward off the 'spectre of exceptionality'. You are no longer talking about the specific circumstances of one work, which could be dismissed as isolated, particular and therefore unrepresentative. While still not allowing for generalisation, comparison strengthens your ability to use **literature as a method of reflection and understanding about systems of power that affect us across space and time**.

The justification process is, as you may have guessed, closely linked to the design of your research question: they feed back into each other and are part of this journey of constantly redefining our goals that we spoke about earlier.

3.6 Analytical Reading

An essential part of the research process is carried out during your close reading of the given literary work or works. Our recommendation is to approach this task with a specific method and a specific critical mindset. The aim will be to engage with an object (in our case, a literary text), so that you can question it and extract relations - with other objects, with the world where the objects are, or with the relations that objects establish with the world - that are not superficially evident. Your goal is not only to see how the literary text represents situations of violence against women. By adopting a gender perspective, you will be able to penetrate the complex nature of the **sociopolitical and cultural causes and determinants** that foster it. Only by taking this approach will you be able to confront this violence within the textual framework and, perhaps, the extratextual framework too.

The first step in the analytical reading process is to identify observations, which you will do by carrying out a very close and contextualised reading of the text and, often, of the authorial figure as well. Observations refer to the units of the text that constitute working material: the narrative voice, passages, quotations, scenes, chapter structure, versification, language uses, rhetorical devices, imagery and so on. Observations are any kind of *raw* excerpt comprising **textual evidence** that you consider relevant to gain a deeper understanding of your topic, to prove your hypothesis, or to better explain not only the content but also the form, style and language of the literary text.

Analytical reading is a methodological process that can be applied to any theme in literary studies. Your specific aim is what will make the difference, acting as a filter for what observations to extract. In our case, the **criterion for identifying and selecting observations** will be determined by the need to test whether the literary work allows for a **critical and transformative analysis** of violence against women. You should therefore seek out and identify observations that reveal *what* forms of violence are represented and *how*. After this, you can also focus on complementary aspects that you believe to be relevant, such as those in which gender comes up. How do you do this? As you read and reread, write down your observations in a notebook or on a tablet or computer (or even in the book itself) and note the page on which each one is found.

As we saw earlier, violence manifests in different ways and has various dimensions. Your task during the analytical reading is to make an initial classification of the observations according to the type of violence you think the text is depicting: physical, psychological, symbolic, institutional, etc. When **you have identified and sorted the**

observations - if possible, **from most to least important** - it is time to move on to the next step: **interpretation**.

How do you interpret the observations? **By questioning them**. We encourage you to ask questions such as “What does this passage imply?”, “Why do I think it is problematic or important?”, “What does it teach me that I didn’t know before?”, “Why has it made me question things I had never thought about?”, and “What knowledge can I relate it to?”. The purpose is to confront your intuition, which led you to single out observations as relevant, in order to draw out the reasons and go a step further in considering this particular issue.

You can also interpret observations **intertextually**, looking for how they relate to each other. You may see that similar observations recur throughout the text, emphasising the importance of the message and thus providing evidence on which to build your argument. It is possible that you come across various series of recurrences that link together, with different dimensions of violence reinforced by commonalities that you have only been able to pick up on by isolating them as observations and interpreting them for their specific meaning. You may also find observations that contradict or oppose each other. This material is valuable for demonstrating that the literary text does not promote a firm and coherent position, but presents itself instead as a vehicle for debate on a series of issues to be problematised.

At the end of the analytical reading you will have a document filled with quantitative notes (observations, quotations and passages that you will use to strengthen your discourse) and qualitative notes, i.e. your interpretations of the observations and their relationships throughout the text, which will form the basis of the arguments to be developed in the analysis portion of your essay.

In short, your relationship with the literary text should be shaped by **two practices**: an **extractive practice**, because you are not an idle reader but an analyst gathering data to find answers to a problem and construct meaning; and a **critical practice**, because you question both the literature on the work and your own findings and attempts to extract meaning.

3.7 Theoretical Framework: Concepts and Terminology

Any research done in a university setting should be thought of as a **contribution to a scholarly conversation or debate** - what you have presented in the state of the art. Thus, you should establish a dialogue with the questions, ideas and contributions on literary matters that have come before you, put forward by people who were interested in RQ similar to the ones you want to work on in your essay. Our worldview is shaped by the cumulative body of thought developed

by the community, but we cannot always identify the origin of what we think we know. Putting time and effort into this exercise of recognising definitions, concepts, ideas and methodologies will help you to ground your understanding in a **shared system of references** and identify your sources of information so that you can use them with rigour and confidence.

Sometimes, employing **key concepts** on the assumption that their meaning will be shared leads to the perpetuation of problematic meanings and the blurring of ideas. This is not to say that we should enter into a spiral of justifying everything that is complex or that we feel is not self-evident. For practical purposes, you should identify the main notions related to your core RQ. Since your challenge is to identify and interpret the literary representation of violence against women, you will need to define and justify your position towards these ideas and concepts. You must also indicate where these concepts come from (who formulated them or who reformulated their meaning), whether you are including them in your discourse with new nuances, or why you are inclined to use a neologism that has not yet been developed theoretically.

In order to write a good theory and terminology section, you need to:

- **Identify** key concepts that pertain to your research. This step relies on **precision and rigour**. Avoid settling for general definitional frameworks, such as providing a broad and superficial overview of what violence against women is. It is worth asking yourself questions such as “Does the RQ address vicarious violence, sexual harassment or sexual violence, or institutional xenophobia?”
- **Define** the key concepts based on references drawn from well-researched studies which are supported by the academic community. All sources must be properly cited.
- **Position** your research and arguments in relation to these definitions. Perhaps you want to check whether the concepts you are using work, as described, in the analysis of the literary text you are studying. Perhaps you want to expand this definition, add some nuance. Or perhaps you want to refute it because you believe you can use your observations to argue that the framework for engaging with these ideas needs to change.

As a starting point, we encourage you to use the definitions of violence presented in Section 5 of this guide – the glossary. We believe you will find them very useful in undertaking this type of research. To expand on any of these ideas or to address more specific notions, you will need to do further research into the academic literature, **especially feminist theoretical studies**. As we have been pointing out, it is a good idea to apply an **intersectional** perspective. This will prime you for more insightful and transformative resistant reading,

as you will be able to grasp the extent to which various oppressions intersect. At the end of the guide we provide a series of reference works that you can use to get started.

3.8 Literary Interpretation

At this point you have written a state of the art, formulated a RQ and established the theoretical and terminological framework that will guide your research. You have also done a careful reading, engaging in dialogue with the available academic literature and inducing your analytical mindset to identify the observations that will help you to develop *your* rigorous and sophisticated interpretation. The next step is to structure your arguments in a way that will help you to meet your specific goals, which are articulated around the RQ. Carrying out this process methodically and systematically will allow you to achieve these goals without getting lost along the way.

There are several ways to structure an essay on literary interpretation. We recommend using a **thematic structure**. Divide the conflict under study into more specific sub-themes, putting forward the most representative arguments that relate the work(s) to the RQ. This will allow you to gradually build the scaffolding you need for critical interpretation. By arranging the analysis into sub-themes, you can move your argumentative discourse forward logically and progressively. Dividing the specific theme into even more specific sub-themes can help you to explain the whole. So, how can you accomplish this?

By always keeping your RQ in mind. Look back at the initial observations and interpretations you made. Organise them into, say, **three sub-themes**.⁴ These sub-themes should *reveal* something about your topic. Rather than merely describing and illustrating the RQ, they should make an argumentative proposition. They should position the literary text as an agent for critical reflection on the conflict. Like in the theoretical portion earlier, your arguments should **corroborate, further or challenge** previous studies. This way, you will enrich and advance the ongoing debate about the work while reaffirming the potential of literature to highlight structures of violence or propose alternatives for its eradication.

The order and structure of arguments are crucial when it comes to clearly and effectively communicating argumentative discourse. We propose the following model for this:

⁴ You can also take care of this step during your analytical reading.

Sub-theme name

Start with a brief presentation of the sub-theme, building on definitions set out in the theoretical framework or that you want to include here because of their specificity.

Example 1: Describe and contextualise the passage of the work on which your observation is based. If you think it is best illustrated with a quotation, add this quote and cite it properly. Give your interpretation, referring back to theoretical concepts as necessary.

Example 2, 3, 4, etc.: Do the same as above repeatedly until you have the right number of examples for the length of your paper. In any case, it is best not to present more than five. Choose the most relevant and appropriate ones, ensuring that they provide new perspectives that further your argumentation.

Example for external support (optional): if you think it is appropriate, you can add an observation from a work other than the one you are primarily analysing that supports your arguments.

Describe the sub-theme again, this time drawing on the examples, and specifically tie it back to the RQ.

The main goal of literary reading is to present arguments that support this interpretation, structured around a RQ, in an orderly, justified and convincing manner - ideally with maximum discursive elegance. The essay should be a synthesis of the most pertinent observations **identified and interpreted by you** and related to the theoretical framework and key concepts in a way that serves the ultimate purpose of the research: to show how well-informed and methodically executed critical reading and interpretation provide greater productive and transformative insight that will potentially help to eradicate male violence and promote discourses of recognition and reparation for victims and survivors.

3.9 Conclusions

All academic research culminates in a set of conclusions. This involves **summarising the arguments** of the interpretation you presented in the analytical section and, of course, proposing an answer to the RQ that aligns with the goals stated in the initial justification of the paper. Careful! This does not necessarily mean that you have to *resolve* the conflict. What it does mean is that you need to address the issues you have problematised throughout the essay in a way that provides closure. It is important that you **do not introduce new information**, especially arguments, in your conclusions.

After providing a synthesised account of your resistant reading, we encourage you to **humbly** but **thought-provokingly** point out **new lines of research** on conflicts that have remained unaddressed or questions that can be further explored in other papers. In this way, you will foster continuity in the academic debate and encourage others to take up the baton.

3.10 Final Review

Going through the process of rewriting and re-evaluating an essay is an often neglected step, but let there be no doubt: it is absolutely fundamental. You should begin to regard it as an essential part of argumentative writing.

When the first draft of your paper or essay is done, it should be set aside. You will have two ways of *revisiting* it later. The first is to **scrutinise it yourself**. For this process you will need to adopt a **demanding, committed and academically honest attitude**. The best thing to do when you finish a draft is to tuck it away in a drawer for a few days. Rereading it with a fresh pair of eyes will allow you to catch any flaws in your writing and correct them. We encourage you to do the following exercises:

- **Check** that all units of meaning (sentences, paragraphs, arguments, sections) are **coherent** and **cohesive**.
- **Fix** spelling mistakes, awkward grammar, repetition or redundancy, weak structures, arguments that do not fit together logically or any lax use of concepts.
- **Ensure** a **uniform register** and **style** throughout your essay. Strive to make your writing more elegant, as this will strengthen the persuasiveness of your arguments.
- **Make sure** that all **ideas and insights** you have drawn from other studies and **direct quotations** from both the primary work and the literature are **properly cited** – *always*.
- **Meticulously revise your references list**.

The second way of revisiting a text, which should complement the first, is to enlist the help of an **external reviewer**. Ask someone if they would be generous enough to read your work, **paying critical attention** to its content and **providing constructive feedback**. Encourage them to check that everything works, looking at both how the arguments are built and how the text is written. They will surely point out areas for improvement, as from a critical distance they will be able to identify weaknesses that you, on your own, will not have detected. Although it can sometimes be difficult to accept such criticism – because we have to overcome an initial sense of frustration, rejection or insecurity – we must learn to do so. Take it as something positive: look through their observations and implement whatever you find appropriate. This exercise of revising your own work based on the critical contributions of others, which is fundamental in academic culture, will not only improve the quality of your text, but get you to reinforce the ever-essential habit of self-criticism.

There is room for continuous improvement in any project, so try not to obsess over preparing a flawless text. What is important is that you have presented solid interpretative goals, have put forward

arguments that are backed by textual evidence from the literary work you are studying, have reached relevant and coherent conclusions that respond to the problems posed at the beginning of the paper or essay and have defended them with confidence.

3.11 List of Good Practices

Finally, we would like to give you some **specific recommendations** to keep in mind while planning, executing and reviewing your work. We invite you to use them as a practical checklist. Simply go through each of the points on the list and **check that you are taking them into account**.

- Articulate your own literary interpretation, taking into account the tradition in which the work is set and its contextual framework
- Apply the theoretical framework to your reading of the work.
- Identify the nature and intersection of different forms of violence and explore whether their root causes and consequences are portrayed
- Identify latent ideologies
- Analyse the aesthetic formalisation of violence
- Analyse how bodies are treated
- Elucidate whether the text prompts an ethical response from the reader
- Examine whether forms of resistance and response to violence are depicted and whether they take on a political dimension
- Establish a good dialogical relationship with the academic literature
- Use concepts and terminology rigorously
- Be mindful of your own position of privilege or subordination, as the case may be, and make this explicit
- Abandon discourses that are opportunistic or based on a victim mentality

Here are also some concepts,⁵ positions and practices that **you should *always* avoid**:

- Confusing reality with the literary representation of reality (fiction)
- Gender bias
- Gender blindness
- Binary classifications
- Essentialism

5 See the glossary in Section 5.

- Stereotypes and clichés
- Ethnocentrism
- Mindless interpretations and universal generalisations
- Inconsistency and lack of finesse in argumentation
- The binary construct of good versus evil
- Plagiarism (intentional and unintentional, when the interpretation of another is incorporated into the text without acknowledging the author and source)
- Revictimisation
- Universalising your own assumptions
- Careless use of terms and concepts
- Assuming that minority cultures and groups have higher rates of violence

3.12 References

Every piece of academic writing must provide a list of references. This list should only include the literary texts you are analysing (primary works) and the studies or other information sources you have consulted during your research and cited in your paper (secondary works and sources). The references must be well-founded academic studies and reflect that the gender perspective has been taken into account in the research. When formatting this list, follow a single referencing standard meticulously and systematically.