

# [Reader-response vs. new criticism essay sample](https://assignbuster.com/reader-response-vs-new-criticism-essay-sample/)

New Criticism vs. Reader-Response
A piece of work can be evaluated in plenty of ways. Critique methods such as Reader-Response, Deconstructive Criticism, New Criticism, and many others act as examples of literary evaluations. All of the critique methods share similarities, but differ in other ways. Reader-Response and New Criticism, for example, share characteristics but they are also two very opposing things. Reader-Response focuses on attention towards the text influenced by the reader’s thoughts. New Criticism aims towards the text with no influence, but the text alone. The two methods share the same features such as excluding the author’s intentions and recognizing details from the texts, and they also contrast by having a different analysis and objective.

The factors of the two criticisms both reject the author’s intentions and are directed towards finding the meaning of a text. New Criticism searches for a meaning but does not allow the author’s idea to influence the process. Reader-Response does the same thing. The critique points out the message without the author’s thoughts. In result, the concept of not having the author involved in the studying process enhances the reader to really focus on the text. In another sense, both are forms of criticism aiming for a meaning behind the written content. The interpretations will result differently in each literary analysis; however, they still possess the same purpose. The similar features between New Criticism and Reader-Response are defined in a generalized sense compared to their differences.

On the other hand, Reader-Response differs from New Criticism because they interpret meanings in another way, have different views, and focus differently too. The purpose of Reader-Response is to read closely and understand the meaning through what the reader believes it means. Reader-Response invites the reader to think of as many interpretations as they can; in other words, there are no limits as to how many meanings a text may have. This critique method already defines itself in its name: ‘ reader-response’; in this case, the reader’s response to the text defines what really matters. The criticism encourages the reader to explore his thoughts while reading a text. A person may read something over and over again and interpret a different meaning every time. For Reader-Response, the type of focuses required comes from the reader. Personal experiences and opinions are what trigger the message of the text.

They help the reader understand the text better because now they have involved themselves within the text, not just the content by itself, like New Criticism, for example. These factors are what make the responses subjective. For example, the quote from The Things They Carried by Tim O’Brien says, “ He should’ve carried her up the stairs to her room and tied her to the bed and touched that left knee all night long,” (618). The quote can be interpreted in a few ways. “ . . . And touched that left knee all night long,” could be comparing the action of ‘ touching’ to sexual relations. The quote could also be taken in a literal sense, having the knee actually touched by the character’s hands. Another part of the quote, “ . . . tied her to the bed . . .” could possibly mean that he wanted to keep her in bed all night and spend time with her; however, in a literal sense, he probably truly could have wanted to tie her to the bed. As stated earlier, defining the meaning of a text for reader-response criticism requires the reader to state what they probably thinks the words mean.

Furthermore, New Criticism opposes Reader-Response in strategies such as other forms of interpreting, a different type of focus point, and thinking differently. New critics read the text closely and try to comprehend what the words alone are saying. They avoid whatever the author’s intentions were, as well as the reader’s thoughts, unlike Reader-Response. They believe that to truly recognize the literary art of the piece, the focus of the text should not involve the author or the reader. In other words, while reading the text, all the attention concentrates on the text and nothing else. In contrast to Reader-Response, New Criticism, however, restricts to one meaning and one meaning only. New critics believe that the meaning is within the text waiting to be found.

Having said that, the way you focus should exclude all other thoughts besides what the reader believes what the text is really trying to say. A person may read a piece of material over and over again, but the meaning of it must remain the same. For instance, in The Things They Carried, the quote, “ He had loved Martha more than his men, and as a consequence Lavender was now dead, and this was something he would have to carry like a stone in his stomach for the rest of the war,” (626). After repeating the quote a numerous of times, no other interpretations seem to exist. The quote clearly means a feeling of guilt will be carried on for a long while in view of the fact that the character was blaming himself for his soldier’s unwanted death. In reference to New Criticism, only one meaning was obtained for this quote.

As said earlier, New Criticism limits a reader’s thoughts, while Reader-Response welcomes a reader’s thoughts, the opposite. Although both critique theories differ in numerous ways, they are still quite similar in a few other ways. Whatever a text may say, it is meant to have either one meaning or more than one. Using New Criticism helps the reader understand a text by looking more into the material without thinking of what the author might have written it for. Using Reader-Response also helps the reader understand a text by sharing their thoughts with others and creating different ideas for every read. Overall, literary work will always be criticized in all types of ways.