SOME WAYS YOU CAN APPROACH A LITERARY TEXT

1. Who wrote it and why? How do the writer's concerns appear in the text?
   * Biographical criticism
   * Psychoanalytical criticism

2. How about texts that seem to have no author?
   * Folklore studies
   * Oral studies

3. What (or how) does it mean?
   * Linguistic criticism (the nature and structure of the text's language)
   * Hermeneutics (the philosophy--or art--of interpretation)
   * Phenomenology (pure description of the text and its effects)
   * Semiotics (the structure of the text's signs and symbols)
   * Deconstruction (the problematics of language and reading)

4. What perennial or cross-cultural themes and symbols does it engage?
   * Archetypal criticism
   * Comparative literature

5. What literary techniques does it use?
   * Formalist criticism ("New" criticism)
   * Prosody, stylistics, and genre criticism

6. What other texts influenced it, and what other texts did it influence?
   * Literary history
   * Intertextual studies

7. How did the author and the original audience understand the work?
   * Historicism

8. How does it reveal (or conceal) larger social and cultural concerns of the author's day?
   * New Historicism
   * Marxist criticism

9. What effect has it had on audiences over the years, in different time periods?
   * Reception theory

10. How does it affect individual readers like us?
    * Reader response theory

11. How does it express or represent gender, male or female? What is its relation to the history of women, or to the female reader/writer in particular?
    * Feminist criticism
    * Gender criticism

These and other critical approaches are explained in more detail in M. H. Abram's Glossary of Literary Terms.