

In **literary theory**, a **text** is any object that can be "read," whether this object is a work of literature, a street sign, an arrangement of buildings on a city block, or styles of clothing. It is a coherent set of **signs** that transmits some kind of informative **message**.^[1] This set of symbols is considered in terms of the informative message's *content*, rather than in terms of its physical form or the medium in which it is represented.

Within the field of **literary criticism**, "text" also refers to the original information content of a particular piece of writing; that is, the "text" of a work is that primal symbolic arrangement of letters as originally composed, apart from later alterations, deterioration, commentary, translations, **paratext**, etc. Therefore, when literary criticism is concerned with the determination of a "text," it is concerned with the distinguishing of the original information content from whatever has been added to or subtracted from that content as it appears in a given textual document (that is, a physical representation of text).

Since the **history of writing** predates the concept of the "text", most texts were not written with this concept in mind. Most written works fall within a narrow range of the types described by text theory. The concept of "text" becomes relevant if and when a "coherent written message is completed and needs to be referred to independently of the circumstances in which it was created."^[citation needed]

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