

Proposal Due: February 26
First Draft Due: March 5
Peer Review Due: March 8
Final Draft Due: March 15

For this assignment, you are asked to make an argument about your reading of a chosen text. This paper should be approximately 1200 words in length, excluding headers and works cited. Format should be in current MLA style. Use Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1" margins, with page numbers on the top right-hand side. You do not have to use secondary sources for this paper, but you must cite any you consult. You must complete and turn in a proposal for this assignment. You should choose your text from among those we have read for class.

Fundamental components of a close reading

- A thesis that is an assertion about the text. It must be a contestable claim that you can support with description, explanation, and analysis. The thesis should appear in your introduction paragraph.
- Evidence from the text. Quote the specific words or phrases that led you to have the ideas you express. Embed them in your writing using your own words so your reader can better understand and appreciate the quotes the way you do. You will, at minimum, need to address 2 to 3 quoted passages from the text.
- Analysis and explanation of that evidence. Many people have had many different ideas about the words or details you focus on. Explain how you arrived at your ideas about the text as a way to argue for your thesis.

Your paper should adhere to genre expectations of close reading methodology. This means your insights, claims, and arguments should be grounded in textual evidence, and that the specific textual evidence that you are building on should be entirely evident to your reader. Avoid making claims or conjectures with genesis that cannot be traced directly back to the text itself (not its historical or social circumstance). Remember that close reading methodology generally incorporates a high attention to textual details as well as description, explanation, and (evidence-based) interpretation. While it is true that many interpretations can arise from one form of art, this does not mean that there is no "wrong" interpretation. Your interpretation must be based on evidence from the text to be considered valid.

Keep in mind that close reading is a formalist methodology. Therefore, your main claim might focus on form—genre, character development, imagery, literary devices, and mood—or you might support your claim by focusing on formal elements. Formalism is interested in how things happen within the text itself as an independent, standalone work of art. While some arguments in literary criticism seem to be using the text as just an example to argue about a broader issue, the close reading genre privileges the text, and, therefore, the argument should arise out of that attention to the text itself.

You need to make a sustained argument about a central claim. This claim should have several points that support it. These points need to be elaborated on in fully developed paragraphs. The point as well as its relation back to the central claim and to the text should be clear in the topic sentence. Every body paragraph should have textual evidence that you closely read to make your point and support your claim. There should be no abrupt jumps in your logic; explain clearly from where your ideas derive and how develop in a step-by-step fashion as you build your paragraph. Do not assume your reader sees or appreciates the text in the same way you do.

How to write a thesis for a close reading paper:

1. Start with a specific identification of the text to be examined.
 - (a) By juxtaposing north and south through the structure of Cane, Jean Toomer . . .
 - (b) Descriptions of Ellen Chesser and her characterization in The Time of Man . . .
 - (c) Through its embrace of the unexpected, even at times the absurd, Djuna Barnes' Nightwood . . .
2. Insert your evaluative and contestable claim.
 - (a) . . . we can see [something you will argue is illuminated through description and analysis] . . .
 - (b) . . . [claim on the positive or negative the quality of the style and its ability to successfully or unsuccessfully achieve something] . . .
 - (c) . . . show her to be [a claim about her character] . . .
3. Assert the significance of your claim.
 - (a) . . . this is important because it helps us better appreciate [something specific about the] aesthetic quality of the text.
 - (b) . . . this is important because it gives us insight into [something specific about] gender dynamics.
 - (c) . . . this is important because it illuminates something true about [a highly specific aspect of] lived experience/human nature.

A successful close reading paper should

1. Fulfill the basic expectations of the assignment: word count, MLA formatting, correct grammar usage, appropriate tone, fully developed sentences and paragraphs.
2. Fulfill basic close reading genre expectations: all claims derived from textual study/evidence, clear communication a claim's pathways back to the text, an appreciate of the text as an independent work of art not affected by intent or circumstance. Avoids relying on historical context or secondary source information.
3. Make a new and independent argument: shows a student's clear and direct voice, shows insightfulness in making connections, shows a felicity in the understanding the ins-and-outs of one's own argument. Avoid using secondary source material beyond defining terms.
4. Successfully suggest larger implications: abstracts knowledge made from close reading the text to suggest new understandings about something such as genre, characterization, artistic beauty, et. cetera.

As a part of this assignment, we will work together to create a collaborative rubric. You will then use this rubric to complete a reflective self-assessment that you will submit at the same time as the final draft (see separate assignment sheets for further information).