

# Literary Form and Analysis

Instructional Materials for ENG 300  
Portland State University

Josh Epstein, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Department of English  
Portland State University



# Copyright Statement

© 2020 Josh Epstein



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (CC BY-NC 4.0)

You are free to:

Share—copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt—remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution—You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions—You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Non-Commercial—You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

# Accessibility Statement

PDXScholar supports the creation, use, and remixing of open educational resources (OER). Portland State University (PSU) Library acknowledges that many open educational resources are not created with accessibility in mind, which creates barriers to teaching and learning. PDXScholar is actively committed to increasing the accessibility and usability of the works we produce and/or host. We welcome feedback about accessibility issues our users encounter so that we can work to mitigate them. Please email us with your questions and comments at [pdxscholar@pdx.edu](mailto:pdxscholar@pdx.edu)

“Accessibility Statement” is a derivative of [Accessibility Statement](#) by BCcampus, and is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

## Accessibility of Literary Form and Analysis

Literary Form and Analysis meets the criteria outlined below, which is a set of criteria adapted from BCCampus’ [Checklist for Accessibility](#), licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

This material contains the following accessibility and usability features:

### Organization of content

- Content is organized under headings and subheadings, which appear in sequential order and are reflected in the corresponding Table of Contents
- List structures (numbered and unnumbered) are used

### Images

- All images contain alternative text and are in-line with text
- Images do not rely on color to convey meaning

### Tables

- All tables include header rows and cell padding, with the exception noted in the Known Issues section
- Tables do not include merged or split cells, with the exceptions noted in the Known Issues section

### Font Size and formatting

- Font size is 12 point or higher for body text
- Font size is 9 or higher is used for footnotes, captions, and text inside tables

## Known Issues/Potential barriers to accessibility

- Descriptive link text is not used consistently. Many hyperlinks are spelled out in full.
- Text relies on color to convey meaning
- In the sections, Scanning Poetic Meter and Traction and Pivot repeated characters or excessive spaces are used for formatting

If you have trouble accessing this material, please let us know at [pdxscholar@pdx.edu](mailto:pdxscholar@pdx.edu).

*This accessibility statement has been adopted and adapted from [Accessibility Statement](#) and [Appendix A: Checklist for Accessibility](#) found in [Accessibility Toolkit - 2nd Edition](#) by BCcampus, and is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).*

# Preface

*I said, "I'm certain there is no fine thing  
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring."*

— *W. B. Yeats, "Adam's Curse" (1903)*

I have had many opportunities to teach “Literary Form and Analysis” (ENG 300), a required “core” course for undergraduate English majors and minors at Portland State University. It has a reputation of being a demanding class—regardless of who teaches it—and poses many puzzles for instructors as well. These challenges have been compounded by the need to take/teach the class both online and in-person, even more so in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis (and various other calamities of the year 2020), during which I write these words.

Teaching the course has rewarded a great deal of “trial and error,” and I am appreciative of my students for patiently participating in that process. I have often felt that the course would be more manageable for everyone if there were a central “hub” for the array of materials. “Literary Form and Analysis” is a big subject to cover in a ten-week quarter (more on this in a moment), and the topics multiply like [Tribbles from the infamous Star Trek episode](#). Having them in one corral can stabilize the course and make it a little less overwhelming.

Supported by a grant from the PSU Library, I have organized many of my instructional materials for ENG 300, and written some new ones, into this open-access “coursepack” document, so that future students and instructors can draw on them, adapt them, and use them to support their work in whatever ways they deem helpful. This document contains a sample syllabus (I’ve removed some of the policy language, for concision), with internal links to course handouts that discuss some essential elements of literary analysis. That syllabus changes from quarter to quarter, as do the texts and handouts, so I offer it as one possible version of many.

Since one of my main goals in this class is to prepare students for success in the advanced (at PSU, 400-level) courses for which 300 is a prerequisite, that is one of the first questions I ask myself when designing the course: *what do I want my 400-level students to know, or know how to do, on Day One?* The handouts and assignments are designed with that question in mind. ENG 300 is thus a bit of a strange animal: a bridge between the lower-division (200-level) surveys into the advanced (400-level) seminars and practica, on topics that span very widely, ENG 300 can tend to have elements of both the basic and the conceptually arcane. But I have heard back from many former ENG 300 acolytes that they have continued to consult these materials as they proceeded through the major, in some cases even in graduate school.

Like so many things in the discipline of English, and like pretty much everything at PSU, ENG 300 has a complicated history. Though it may seem a bit “inside baseball,” I’ve found it helpful to explain some of this background to students on the first day of the course. I shall try to keep it short and not overly laborious, as I would on the first day of an in-person class. (No doubt opinions differ on how successful I am at that, but I try!)

## Some Background on ENG 300

In its original form, “Critical Methods in English,” ENG 300 introduced students to the study of what we loosely term “literary theory.” It was an upper-division course, designed for students who already had some background in the basics of literary study and needed a gateway into the topics studied at higher levels. As PSU and the English Department expanded, this course was tasked with more and more duties. As a required class in the major—and, for many transfer students, their first PSU English class—it was newly entitled “Introduction to the English Major.” The new title identified the course as a foundational course, introducing students not just to English generally but to the English *major* as an academic discipline (akin to what some fields call a “methodologies” class). This form of ENG 300 served several functions: introducing the basics of “close reading” literary texts, covering writing and research skills needed for upper-division coursework, and continuing to offer instruction in “theory” and critical methods.

In a word, *oof*. This was a lot for any one course to handle, especially in a ten-week quarter. The withdrawal and failure rates in this course were grim (don’t panic, students; this is no longer the case!). In my few attempts at teaching that version of the course, it did justice to none of these topics. Students did well and went on to great things—through their own industry, more than my pedagogy—but the course felt like a bad buffet (I speak from experience): multiple courses piled into one, none of them very satisfying. And the paradoxical quality of an upper-division course called “Introduction” proved disorienting for everyone, including professors and students, as well as academic advisors trying to help students enroll in courses for which they were prepared.

The English Department redesigned the major in 2017. That laborious but necessary process involved rethinking ENG 300 and the “core” of the major. We effectively broke the “old” ENG 300 into two courses: its new and (as of now) current form, “Literary Form and Analysis,” and a second class, “Critical Writing in English” (WR 301), which focuses on writing skills, research, and critical methods (usually including some theory, whether literary, rhetorical, pedagogical, etc.). There is, by design, overlap and reinforcement between these courses: growth as a writer involves growth as a reader, and every English class is a study in both writing and reading.

To date, this redesign has been a success, particularly in ENG 300, where student performance is much improved. Between the two core courses, we have found that students enter their advanced coursework with stronger writing skills than before, and a better foothold in core concepts of literary, rhetorical, and cultural analysis. (The redesigned major also gives students more flexibility for electives, so the addition of a second “core” class is rewarded.)

The course is still challenging—as it should be. But the challenges are less burdensome and more productive than the intractable Optimus Prime assemblage that was the previous version of 300. And at its most challenging, the class also offers students a window into the advanced topics offered at the 400 level (that is, the topics for which ENG 300 is meant to prepare them).

ENG 300 is taught by many PSU faculty, with different points of emphasis, different texts, and different assignments. I by no means offer the version included here as a “standard” or “correct” one—I often tinker with its form and content, myself—but I have found that it works effectively.

## Open Access

With the support of the PSU Library, I have also worked to reduce textbook and printing costs by shifting the course predominantly to open access materials, including most (not all) assigned texts). Most literary texts don't suffer from the inflationary zeal of the textbook market—but they aren't cheap, especially for students taking several classes. Not all things come down to dollars and cents, but with the many other pressures of ENG 300, and college generally, reducing some financial pressure is worth a try. My target is a total textbook and printing cost of under \$20.

And though my own technology “chops” are not particularly sophisticated, I continue to experiment with ways of mixing the old and the new: of using new technologies of collaborative discussion, text-annotation, document-sharing, and mixed-media assignments to discuss “canonical” texts in printed formats; and, conversely, helping students practice scholarly methods of analysis with texts other than the conventional paperback novel or printed poem. Not all of those experiments are reflected here, but I continue to try to develop more of them, and if you teach ENG 300 or a similar course, I hope you will feel free to do the same.

It is in that spirit that I offer these materials under Creative Commons licensing, so that you can adapt and repurpose them for your own non-commercial needs. If you use these materials, please credit them properly (keeping in mind that ENG 300 occasionally involves the Big Plagiarism Speech™!), and make your work freely available for others to adapt in their turn.

I also hope that you'll share your adaptations of these materials with me: I'm sure that I can learn from your adjustments, and it's nice to know if anyone's reading. Hello? Hello?

## Closing Remarks and Acknowledgements

I continue to revise these materials for my students' and my needs, and I hope you will do the same. The process of trial and error is by no means over: as I tell my students often, writing projects are never finished, merely abandoned. If any of these materials have nurtured a student's ability to read literature with more confidence, greater sophistication, and deeper pleasure, that is the reason we're here, and it would be a gift to know about it.

I am grateful to the PSU Library, especially Karen Bjork and Amy Sanforth, for their support of this project and for their guidance on elements of licensing, document design, and general organization of the work. I also wish to acknowledge my former ENG 300 students. As I've said, ENG 300 has not always been “user-friendly,” but the students' resilience, good humor, and willingness to dive in headfirst has been consistently impressive.

To my current and future students, I hope you find the course rewarding, even if it is challenging. As a former ENG 300 student (now graduated) once exclaimed, *WE CAN DO HARD THINGS!* She was right. There will be hard work involved, as there is in anything of lasting value. I hope ENG 300 will be one such thing.

Josh Epstein  
September 2020  
[jepstein@pdx.edu](mailto:jepstein@pdx.edu)

# Table of Contents

Literary Form and Analysis .....	1
Copyright Statement .....	1
Accessibility Statement.....	2
Accessibility of Literary Form and Analysis .....	2
Organization of content.....	2
Images .....	2
Tables .....	2
Font Size and formatting.....	2
Known Issues/Potential barriers to accessibility.....	3
Preface.....	4
Some Background on ENG 300.....	5
Open Access.....	6
Closing Remarks and Acknowledgements .....	6
Table of Contents .....	7
Sample Syllabus.....	9
Course Description.....	9
Course Learning Objectives.....	9
Expected Preparation .....	9
Coursework and Assessment .....	10
Policies and Resources.....	11
Academic Conduct.....	11
Title IX and Anti-Discrimination.....	12
Course Schedule.....	13
Unit One: Poetry .....	13
Unit Two: Drama .....	15
Unit Three: Prose Fiction.....	15
Close Reading .....	17
What is it, How do We Do It, and Who Cares? .....	17
Annotating a Poem.....	20



Poetry and Genre.....	23
Major Genres of Poetry.....	24
Lyric.....	24
Dramatic.....	24
Narrative.....	25
Merging Genres.....	25
Scanning Poetic Meter: How, Why, and “So What”.....	27
Definitions:.....	27
How to Mark and Identify Scansion:.....	29
Practice Scansion Exercises.....	35
Quoting Poetry in MLA Literature Essays.....	40
Quoting Fiction in MLA Literature Essays.....	43
Quoting Drama in Literature Essays.....	44
Sonnets: An Introduction.....	46
Soy loca con mi tigre: volta, volta, volta.....	48
Varieties of the Sonnet in English.....	48
How to Approach a Sonnet.....	50
Discussion Questions on The House of Bernarda Alba.....	51
Part A.....	51
Part B.....	51
Dramaturgy: An Introduction.....	53
Dramaturgy resources.....	55
Narrative Voice in Prose Fiction.....	57
More online resources:.....	60
Thinking About Adaptation.....	61
Concepts, Keywords, Questions.....	61
Analyzing Film.....	64
A Few Terms and Concepts for “Reading” Film in a Literature Class.....	64
Traction and Pivot: Using Critical Sources in Literature Essays.....	66
Researched Writing Exercises.....	67
After 300: What Comes Next?.....	70
English Majors and Minors.....	70

# Sample Syllabus

ENG 300 Literary Forms and Analysis

Prof. Josh Epstein

## Course Description

A required “gateway” course for PSU English majors, ENG 300 focuses on skills of literary analysis. Students in this class will learn methods of interpreting the complex relationships between *form* and *content*: *what* a text has to say, and *how* the text is put together. In studying texts of varying genres (poetry, drama, fiction, and film) and through both formal and informal writing exercises, students will gain confidence and ability in asking hard questions of a literary text, exploring its formal and thematic intricacies, and using writing as a tool for developing complex interpretations supported with evidence.

## Course Learning Objectives

In collaboration with WR 301 (the other core class for PSU English majors), this course aims to:

- Help students to formulate sophisticated critical questions about literature, and to investigate those questions through close textual analysis;
- Help students develop proficiency in analyzing the formal qualities of a literary text (e.g. structure, genre, technique, style), and how form shapes and generates meaning;
- Familiarize students with terminology appropriate to the analysis of literature;
- Familiarize students with texts of varying genres, and the conventions of those genres;
- Develop skill and confidence in writing academic essays about literature.

## Expected Preparation

There are no formal prerequisites for ENG 300. The Department recommends that students enter the class having taken 8+ credit hours in lower-division college English. If you are concerned about your readiness for the course, please feel free to speak with me individually.

**Required Text for Purchase:** [Toni Morrison’s \*Jazz\*](#) (Vintage; ISBN 978-1400076215).

Open Access and Freely Available Materials:

- Poems and glossary terms via the [Poetry Foundation site](#).
- Short readings, handouts, and instructional materials either included in this document or posted to [Desire2Learn](#) (D2L), which you can access using your PDX ID/password.
- Longer texts available for free, using online “open access” versions.
  - Federico García Lorca, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, [available via Drama Online database](#). Access may require you to be on campus or [remotely connected](#).

- Herman Melville, *Billy Budd* (link to be distributed via D2L).

You are welcome to access these on your computer or tablet, to check out a tablet or laptop from the library—whatever works best for you. If you prefer to work from paper copies (as I do), feel free to acquire any edition from any source that you like (including the library—though I ask that you resist the temptation to write in library books, even in pencil). Note that we are reading the Lorca text in translation, so different versions will not be identical.

## Coursework and Assessment

### Assignments and Grading

- [Major Assignments](#) (details posted separately to D2L):
  - Podcast Assignment: 150 points
  - Formal Analysis of Fiction or Drama: 150 points
  - Final Comparative Essay: 200 points
- [Participation and Preparation](#) (P&P), including attendance: 200 points.
- [D2L Postings and Homework](#): 150 points total.
- [Take-Home Final Exam](#) (concept map): 150 points

Additional grading criteria will be posted to D2L. You are encouraged to review this information prior to submitting your assignments: not only to know where your grades are coming from, but also for guidance on expectations of academic writing about literature.

### Participation and Preparation (P&P)

Come to each class having read all materials, taken notes, and prepared yourself to write, ask questions, contribute ideas, work in groups, and **refer to specific textual examples**. Be sure to bring the required readings with you to class.

### D2L Postings and Other Homework

Frequent short homework assignments and D2L postings in preparation for class discussion and longer assignments. Each posting/assignment is graded out of 10 points; the total will be normed to a score out of 150. Postings may be graded for completeness, correctness, and/or reference to specifics. Please take each posting seriously and complete it fully; like solving a math problem, you learn from it only if you push yourself to work through difficulties.

### Major Assignments

Detailed prompts for the major assignments will be distributed separately. Essays must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman, with 1” margins on all sides and pages numbered. **Follow MLA style** in all matters of [manuscript format](#), [quotation format](#), [citation format](#), and [Works Cited](#) format. I have posted a sample essay to D2L.

## Take-Home Final Exam

For the final exam, you will complete a **concept map** of our course topics and texts, along with a written commentary. Unfortunately, because I have a very short turn-around time to submit final grades, I cannot offer extensions on this assignment or accept it late.

## Policies and Resources

### Accessibility

If you need accommodations for a disability or other condition, please speak with the [Disability Resource Center](#), and notify me during the first week of class. I am committed to making reasonable accommodations for all students, provided that they are arranged *in advance* (regrettably, I cannot “post-date” accommodations or make them retroactively).

### Office Hours and Email

- Office hours are open for students, with or without an appointment. I am happy to speak with you about your work, your progress in the course, or college in general. If you wish to speak with me outside of office hours, please email to make an appointment.
- Detailed or complex questions (grades, drafts, etc.) should be handled in person. If you have a quick question that can be handled efficiently, feel free to send an email. Please treat emails to professors as *courteous professional correspondence*: include a subject heading, a greeting (e.g. “Hello Prof. Epstein”), and a sign-off (“Thanks, [Pat]”); write in complete sentences and a mature tone. For advice, see “[How to Email a Professor](#).”

### Advising

I encourage you to meet frequently with your advisor to discuss your academic planning. If you don’t know who your advisor is, please consult the [PSU Advising homepage](#).

### Support for Basic Needs

On our D2L page, I have posted a lengthy list of Student Life resources. The PSU CARE Team also has an [excellent list of resources](#) for students experiencing food, housing, or other personal crises. If you have trouble accessing sufficient food or stable housing, the following can help:

- **Food:** [PSU Food Pantry](#) and [Free Food Market](#).
- **Housing:** The [Dean of Student Life Office](#) (SMSU 433) is a good first place to go. The ASPSU has prepared a helpful [list of housing resources](#).

### Academic Conduct

Everything you submit in ENG 300 must represent your own work, completed specifically for this course and section. You must cite any use of someone else’s words or ideas; when borrowing someone else’s language (even a short “catchy” phrase), you must cite the source *and* enclose the borrowed phrase(s) in “quotation marks.” Paraphrasing a source in your own words is ok (as long as you appropriately cite the source), whereas mere “word-rearranging” or

[patchwriting](#) is a form of plagiarism. I encourage you to review the PSU Library's modules on [avoiding plagiarism](#) and [quotation and paraphrase](#). **Any plagiarism or cheating incident, or other violations of the [Code of Student Conduct](#), will result in a grade of zero and will be referred to the Dean of Students.** If you are unsure about what you're doing, please consult with me *before submitting the assignment*. Uncertainty about the rules is not an excuse for violating them.

## Title IX and Anti-Discrimination

I consider this class a workplace, and do not permit hate speech or harassment on any grounds, including race, gender, nationality, immigration status, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. You may report any incident of discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment, to the [Office of Equity and Compliance](#) or the [Dean of Student Life](#). As a faculty member, I am obligated to report cases of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or prohibited discrimination. If you wish to discuss these matters confidentially with someone who does not have reporting obligations, consult PSU's [Get Help site](#) or contact an advocate at 503.725.5672.

# Course Schedule

(This class ordinarily meets for ten weeks, twice a week: hence, “W1d1” = “Week 1, day 1,” etc. It was based on a fall quarter, hence the Thanksgiving Break during Week 9. Adjust as needed!)

## Unit One: Poetry

**Unless noted otherwise, you can find poems and glossary terms via the Poetry Foundation site.**

### Week 1

W1d1 Introductions. Read coursepack [preface](#); Adrienne Rich, “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”

W1d2 Topic: Voice and Purpose

- From [Poetry Glossary](#): alliteration, apostrophe, assonance, consonance, couplet, ekphrasis, enjambment, ode, rhyme, stanza, sublime
- Read sections in coursepack: [close reading](#); [annotating poems](#); [genres of poetry](#).
- Discuss [Podcast Assignment](#) and sign up for pairs/groups.
- Poems:
  - Craig Arnold, “[Bird-Understander](#)”
  - Sylvia Plath, “[Morning Song](#)”
  - Joy Harjo, “Unmailed Letter” (posted to D2L)
  - Listen to podcast on “[Unmailed Letter](#)” (#042)

D2L Posting due.

### Week 2

W2d1 Meter, Rhythm, Sound

- Read section in coursepack on [poetic scansion](#), and complete [the exercises](#).
- James Longenbach, “[The Music of Poetry](#)”
- Poems for W2d1:
  - Patricia Smith, “Jumping Doubledutch” (D2L)
  - Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “[Break, Break, Break](#)”
  - Theodore Roethke, “[My Papa’s Waltz](#)”
  - Annie Finch, “[In Cities, Be Alert](#)”

D2L Posting due.

W2d2 Topic: Image and Figure of Speech.

- Read coursepack section [on citing and quoting poetry in MLA](#).
- On D2L: Pound, imagism excerpts;
- [Poetry Glossary](#): imagery, imagism, Metaphysical poets, metaphor, metonymy, simile, symbol.

- Poems
  - Ezra Pound, "[In a Station of the Metro](#)"
  - John Donne, "[A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning](#)"
  - Emily Dickinson, "[My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—](#)"
  - Elizabeth Bishop, "[The Fish](#)"

**D2L Posting due.** Go to the D2L forum (D2L—>Activities—>Discussions). On the forum entitled "Image and Symbol," write a posting in response to the prompt.

Week 3

W3d1 Topic: Closed Form

- [Poetry Glossary](#): couplet, epigram, sonnet, volta
- Read section in handout on [Sonnets](#).
- Poems. (We won't get to all of these in class, but read them all carefully.)
  - An assemblage of couplets and epigrams (D2L)
  - Countee Cullen, "Yet Do I Marvel" (D2L)
  - John Keats, "On the Sonnet" (D2L)
  - William Wordsworth, "[Nuns Fret Not at their Convent's Narrow Room](#)"
  - William Shakespeare, [Sonnet 116](#)
  - John Donne, [Holy Sonnet 14](#) ("Batter my heart")
  - Gerard Manley Hopkins, "[God's Grandeur](#)"

**D2L Posting due.** See prompt on the forum entitled "Sonnets."

W3d2 Topic: Irony

- [Poetry Glossary](#): irony, dramatic monologue
- Poems:
  - Robert Browning, "[My Last Duchess](#)"
  - Robert Frost, "[The Road Not Taken](#)"
  - Thomas Hardy, "[The Darkling Thrush](#)" and "[The Ruined Maid](#)"
  - Percy Bysshe Shelley, "[Ozymandias](#)"

**D2L posting due.** See prompt on the forum entitled "Dramatic Monologues."

Week 4

W4d1 Use day to workshop podcasts. **Homework: Bring two copies of your podcast script/outline** (one to turn in, one to workshop in class). Feel free to bring laptops, etc.

## Unit Two: Drama

W4d2 **Podcast due.** In class: read Act I of *Bernarda Alba*, watch Dalí/Buñuel, *Un chien andalou*.

### Week 5

W5d1 Finish *Bernarda Alba*. In coursepack, read [discussion questions on the play](#).

**D2L Posting:** In 1-2 paragraphs apiece, address two discussion questions from the handout, citing specific textual examples.

W5d2 *Bernarda Alba*, cont. From coursepack, read handout on [dramaturgy](#).

## Unit Three: Prose Fiction

### Week 6

W6d1 Read section in coursepack on [narrative voice](#); Atwood, “My Last Duchess” (D2L). **D2L Posting:** Response to Atwood/Browning due before class (details TBD)

W6d2 Read *Billy Budd*, chs. 1-10. Also read the **Formal Analysis assignment sheet** (D2L).

**D2L Posting:** Locate two moments in the novel where you observe something intriguing about Melville’s use of **narrative technique**. Maybe our narrator is being particularly intrusive or disruptive to the flow of the story, maybe its bias or (un)reliability is becoming clear, etc. Identify each scene by chapter; for each scene, write 150-200 words on how the narrative voice affects the scene or the novella as a whole. Use appropriate terms from the recent coursepack reading on narrative voice.

### Week 7

W7d1 Finish *Billy Budd*.

W7d2 **Formal Analysis due, beginning of class.** In class: watch Claire Denis, *Beau Travail*.

### Week 8

W8d1 Discuss *Beau Travail*. Read sections in coursepack on [adaptation](#) and [analyzing film](#).

Get a head start on reading *Jazz* for Thursday (there’s a big chunk of reading due).

W8d2 *Jazz* (through p.135)



Week 9

W9d1 Finish *Jazz* (pp.137-229). Watch [Charlie Rose interview with Toni Morrison](#).

**D2L Posting:** Prompts TBD.

W9d2 No class

Week 10

W10d1 Wrap up on *Jazz*. **Peer-review of final essay**. Bring **two printed copies** of a draft.

W10d2—**Final essay due**. Meet in computer lab to work on final exams. Complete Reflection Exercise from coursepack (“[After 300: What Comes Next?](#)”)

Take-Home Final Exam Due Date TBA.

---



Syllabus developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# Close Reading

What is it, How do We Do It, and Who Cares?

Before we discuss my “take” on close reading, I’ll give you some from other sources. It is a concept that one sees defined in many different ways, and though they generally add up to the same thing, it can be helpful to see them framed differently. Indeed, this is one of the central premises of literary analysis: *how* something is expressed changes *what* is expressed. Here, then, are a few explanations from a range of institutions and sources. From these, we can assemble our own working definitions. (There are some claims below that I myself do not endorse, but that’s ok too; the point is to discuss what we’re doing when we analyze a text.)

“[How to Do a Close Reading](#),” Patricia Kain, Harvard University (emphasis added)

[M]ost essays, especially academic essays, begin with a close reading of some kind of text—a painting, a movie, an event—and usually with that of a *written* text. When you close read, you **observe facts and details about the text**. You may focus on a particular passage, or on the text as a whole. Your aim may be to notice all **striking features of the text, including rhetorical features, structural elements, cultural references**; or, your aim may be to notice only *selected* features of the text—for instance, **oppositions and correspondences, or particular historical references**. Either way, making these observations constitutes the first step in the process of close reading. The second step is interpreting your observations. What we're basically talking about here is inductive reasoning: **moving from the observation of particular facts and details to a conclusion, or interpretation, based on those observations**. And, as with inductive reasoning, close reading requires careful gathering of data (your observations) and careful thinking about what these data add up to.

[Close reading handout from Bucks County Community College](#):

Close reading is a method of literary analysis which focuses on the specific details of a passage or text in order to discern some deeper meaning present in it. The meaning derived from the close reading is the reader’s interpretation of the passage or text. . . . Close reading tends to rely on the principle that no details are present in a text by “accident.” The author’s conscious intentions in writing are often insignificant, as unconscious layers of meaning or even prejudices may be sublimated into literary works. Regardless of whether an author consciously or unconsciously constructs a particular meaning in a text, if details are present which support that interpretation, it is valid.

From Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2018).

The nuanced and thorough analysis of a literary text. Close reading places particular emphasis on the interrelationships among textual elements (such as allusions, diction, images, and sound effects) and provides a means of interpreting the text and illuminating its complexities and ambiguities. Close reading is often associated with *explication de texte*, a method of exegesis [interpretation, explanation] that originated in France, and the New Criticism, a formalist variety

of literary criticism that arose in the United States [JE: and in Britain, where it was referred to as “practical criticism].

From [Literary Link](#) (emphasis added).

An explication de texte (cf. Latin explicare, to unfold, to fold out, or to make clear the meaning of) is a finely detailed, very specific examination of a short poem or short selected passage from a longer work, in order to find the focus or design of the work, either in its entirety in the case of the shorter poem or, in the case of the selected passage, **the meaning of the microcosm, containing or signaling the meaning of the macrocosm** (the longer work of which it is a part). To this end “close” reading calls attention to all **dynamic tensions, polarities, or problems in the imagery, style, literal content, diction, etc.** By examining and thinking about opening up the way the poem or work is perceived, writers establish a central pattern, a design that orders the narrative and that will, in turn, order the organization of any essay about the work. ... Close reading or *explication de texte* operates on the premise that literature ... will be more fully understood and appreciated to the extent that **the nature and interrelations of its parts are perceived**, and that that understanding will take the form of insight into the theme of the work in question.

Questions to Consider:

1. Let’s... close read these definitions of close reading! What patterns, recurring features, or commonalities emerge from these definitions?
2. Any places where they seem to clash or differ, or to emphasize different elements of close reading/“explication”?
3. What do these definitions suggest about the question of “intention” (i.e. the old student question, “Yes, but did she really *mean* to do all this, or are we just *reading into it*?”) To what extent does or doesn’t it matter whether something that we identify in an explication is “intentional” or accidental?
4. What is the relationship between how we read a text and then how we go on to write about that text? In other words, if you’re asked (as you will be) to “write a close reading” of a poem or prose passage, how should you go about reading it first?
5. What do these definitions imply about the relationship between part and whole, or “microcosm” and “macrocosm”? (I sometimes think about taking a slice of tissue and looking at it under a microscope, to draw conclusions about the organism.) If we “close read” a part of a text, and use it to draw conclusions about the text as a whole, what are the risks and rewards of doing so? What might we have to think about as we do that?
6. After thinking about and taking some notes on these definitions and questions, **write your own solid definition of “close reading.”** You can borrow or adapt whatever parts of these passages you find most convincing, but please use your own words. We will soon have the chance to discuss your definitions, in person or on the discussion board.



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# Annotating a Poem

**Good reading involves writing.** When you're faced with a piece of writing that seems difficult or obscure, or where the language seems particularly dense and worth "unpacking," it's good to start taking notes as early in the process as possible. This is true of scientific writing, legal writing, academic writing, and literature: use writing as a tool for thinking through, and "talking back to," the poem. Keeping in mind the purpose of "close reading"—to trace patterns and recurring uses of language, to think about relationships between part and whole—it is crucial to engage actively with the text from the moment you first encounter it. These annotations will continue to shape your thinking about its form and content.

There are many approaches to annotating poetry. Some move from "big picture" to small details ([David Rickert advocates for this approach](#)). Some start from details and move from the inside out. I recommend a combination: we want to use small details to complicate our understanding of the poem's big ideas, but also to remember: **poems are made of words**. If we race past the details, we're missing the elements of language and form that make it poem-y.


At every stage, **WRITE DOWN QUESTIONS**: about specific lines, tone shifts, word choices, about the speaker, about theme or mood, etc. You don't have to figure it all out at once. You'll return to these questions, sometimes with answers, sometimes with newer, harder questions.

1. Read the poem three times (or more) through, *at least once out loud*. Ask some of the big questions and **write down** your responses.
  - a. Who's the speaker? What do/don't we know about them? Whom are they addressing, if anyone? Do their attitudes or sense of self change over the course of the poem? Are they trustworthy and reliable, or are they acting kind of shady?
  - b. What's the poem about? Be specific: don't settle for the quick and easy answer ("it's about love and identity in society"; ok, but so is every other poem!). Does it tell a story? Does it identify a specific situation, or a broader human dilemma?
  - c. What's the poem's setting? When and where does it take place? Does it address past/future events? Is its sense of place specific or general, and how is it described?
  - d. What does the poem's title (if there is one) tell us? Is it misleading/deceiving in any way?
  - e. How would you describe the poem's **tone**? Funny, depressed, sarcastic, angry, snobby, etc.? Again, get as specific as you can (it can be several things at once).
  - f. Where does the poem get complex or surprising? Does it employ any forms of irony or paradox that force us to question its surface meanings?

You can also react like a human being. Yes, that's allowed! If the poem makes you sad, feel sad. If the poem makes you laugh, laugh. Just remember that ultimately **you'll need to make arguments about what the poem is doing *on its own terms*, and not merely how it affects you personally**. You'll need to look closely at its language and form, but let the poem do its work on you, first. That's what it's there for, and why you'll return to it in the future (I hope). Fortunately, we are able to think *and* feel at the same time (again, I hope).

Having done all that, write for a while. Get a sense of the poem's overall meaning, context, sensibility, and tone. **You can change your mind later**. Here you're using your **telescope**: getting a broad view of what the text is about, and how it unfolds.

Then, you get out the microscope. Now that we have a general (revisable!) sense of what the poem is saying, we want to pick it apart. **Don't worry about reading too closely**. (No, you won't ruin the poem. That's silly. Complexity won't hurt it, or you.) You are now going to discover new subtleties that lie in the details. And you may find that the details add density and texture to the "telescopic" view of the poem.

 If at any point, you start to approach an idea like the following, WRITE IT DOWN! Immediately! Text it to yourself, if you have to.

On the surface, this poem seems to be saying/doing/about \_\_\_\_\_. But closer examination of \_\_\_\_\_ reveals something more complex: \_\_\_\_\_.

Now we're approaching Thesis-ville: an *argument* about the poem's subtleties, which you'll be able to develop more fully once you get back to your laptop.

(Some of these questions may involve concepts/skills we haven't covered yet, but we will soon!)

1. What is the poem's genre? Is it a lyric poem? A dramatic monologue? "So what?" Does it follow the genre predictably, or does it challenge/defy our expectations?
2. How is the poem organized? Is it broken into stanzas? What does each stanza achieve; why do you think it's broken up this way (or not)? How about line breaks: are lines enclosed or enjambed (spilling over from line to line)? Why/to what effect?
3. What **images** and **figures of speech** does the poem employ? Circle, underline, draw big stars next to images that jump out at you. Remember that images aren't just visual: anything that appeals to the senses of smell, touch, sound, motion, etc.
4. How would you describe the poem's **word choices (diction)**? How do they help to establish the speaker's tone/attitude? Circle, highlight, etc. specific words that jump out at you, and try to identify why. Because they connect meaningfully to the poem's story, meanings, emotional charge, etc.? Because they are especially in or out of character for the poem's speaker? **PLEASE LOOK UP WORDS WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW THEM!**
  - a. The Lit 101 term is "diction," but try to avoid banalities like "The poem uses diction..." This just means "The poem uses words" (which, sure, it does...). I

recommend not using the word “diction” without an adjective in front of it, e.g. “formal diction,” “religious diction,” “violent diction,” etc.

5. What does the language **sound** like? Does it rhyme? How would you characterize the rhythm or meter? Don’t be afraid to [get physical](#) with the poem as you read: tap your feet, clap your hands, etc. Anything that helps you get traction with the poem’s sounds.
6. Where is the poem’s main “turn,” or point of greatest intensity? If you were a composer setting it to music, where would you put the climax?
7. **Where does the poem seem to be doing multiple things at the same time?** Where does it seem to be engaging with paradoxes or ironies? Where does its tone seem ambivalent? What specific elements of the poem help us see this complexity/multiplicity?



This worksheet developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# Poetry and Genre

From *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, ed. Ross Murfin and Supryia Ray, 4th ed. (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018):

*From the French for “kind” or “type,” the classification of literary works on the basis of their content, form, or technique. For centuries works have been grouped according to a number of classificatory schemes and distinctions, such as prose/poem, epic/drama/lyric, and the traditional classical divisions comedy/tragedy/lyric/pastoral/epic/satire. Current usage is broad enough to permit umbrella categories of fiction (e.g. fiction, the novel) as well as subcategories (e.g. science fiction, the sentimental novel) to be denoted by the term genre. ... Contemporary theorists of genre tend to follow the lead of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who ... characterized genre in terms of “family resemblances,” a set of similarities some (but by no means all) of which are shared by works classified together. Viewed this way, genre is a helpful, though arguably loose and arbitrary, categorizing and descriptive device that provides a basic vantage point for examining most historical and many modern and contemporary works. (175)*

Does genre explain everything? Clearly not. It describes some shared features among texts, and offers helpful terms as shorthand for these features, which allow us some analytical perspective. I like the idea of a “family resemblance.” How we define a “family” is, as you know, a pretty variable thing, and members of a family don’t all look and act the same. They share some “umbrella” of experience or identity, whether it’s adopted kinship, wealth, character, habits, bad eyesight, etc. Genre categories are equally elastic. Genres can be defined broadly (“novel”; “drama”) or narrowly (“Petrarchan sonnet”; “post-digital steampunk”; “deep dish houseplant technocore”). The narrower you get, the more precise you can be, but (and) the more you exclude from that genre.

The adjectival form of “genre” is “generic,” i.e. we might refer to the “generic” features of a text. This usage is a bit pretentious when overdone, but it’s useful to know: “generic” doesn’t mean that we’re comparing a text to a Dollar Store can of wax beans.

Not all writers like defining their genres—some find it quite annoying to be “pigeon-holed” in one generic mode. Eddie Condon titled his history of early jazz *We Called it Music*, implying, “not ‘swing,’ not ‘Chicago jazz,’ not ‘Dixieland’—we were creating the music that we needed to create.” But not all artists see it this way. Others *embrace* genre as a way to reinvent a tradition or experiment with a set of conventions, or just because it’s a genre they enjoy and that allows them to ask certain questions about art and about the world. Genres are not always confining or limiting—and even when they are, sometimes artists *like* having limitations within which they can reinvent.

Again, for our purposes as readers/critics, we are thinking of genre not as an all-encompassing “Answer Key” that “solves” the text, but as a vantage point, an “umbrella” for some major



features of a text, or points of comparison with similar texts. And, as literary historians have pointed out, genre can be saturated with social assumptions. A text may not be completely defined by its genre category, but for many complex reasons, certain genres (e.g. the sentimental melodrama, the sci-fi/fantasy novel, the Gothic etc.) have specific cultural leverage at specific moments of history, or have been historically associated with stereotypes of race, nation, class, and gender (e.g. the “chick-flick,” the “imperial romance,” etc.). What are those reasons? Take more English courses!

## Major Genres of Poetry

For the sake of concision, I’m going to keep this to the Big Three:

- Lyric
- Dramatic
- Narrative

### Lyric

From the Greek word for “lyre,” originally any poem designed to be sung while accompanied by a lyre; now a brief imaginative and melodic poem characterized by the fervent but structured expression of the personal thoughts and emotions of a single first-person speaker. ... Lyrics are non-narrative poems; they do not tell a story. ... Common manifestations include the ballad, hymn, ode, and sonnet. (*Bedford* 237; emphasis added)

Most of the poetry we encounter in English courses is lyric: **poetry that expresses the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker**. (Please do not use the term “*lyric* poetry” merely to refer to anything that sounds “lyrical” or pretty. Lyric poems may be “melodic,” but not all melodic poems are lyric!)

In lyric poems there is usually no *explicit* demarcation between the poet and the speaker. We still keep the two distinct, however: the poet is constructing the poem’s voice, sometimes ironically. You might think of the lyric speaker as the poet with a mask on (which is how poetry was performed in ancient Greece—lyre included!)

**Example:** The American writer Claudia Rankine experiments with the lyric in her book-length poems *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* and *Citizen: An American Lyric*. These poems test the limits of the form—bridging the expressive first-person voice of the lyric with social issues of race, policing, media spectacle, etc., and using multimedia and collage to redefine the boundaries of that poetic speaker. Again, we’re talking about a literary “family tree”: lyric poems share a (distant) root and there are a bunch of literary cousins who share that sobriquet. But Rankine is *explicit* about it: she gives her poems that title because she wants us to see her participating in, and radically transforming, that tradition.

### Dramatic

One genre of poetry, popularized in the nineteenth century by Robert Browning, is the **dramatic monologue**, in which a “speaker addresses a silent listener, revealing himself or herself in the context of a dramatic situation” (*Bedford* 106). In Browning’s “My Last Duchess,” a Duke

addresses a wealthy aristocrat, who asks about a portrait on the wall, which occasions the speaker to reveal that he is a controlling, insecure murderer. Obviously this is information the Duke would just as soon keep to himself, but through Browning's use of dramatic irony, the monologue unfolds hidden truths about the speaker's psychological impulses. A modern example is T. S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in which a stream of consciousness exposes the speaker's unconscious feelings, which he can barely even articulate to himself, let alone to his lady friend.

Some would group dramatic monologue as a "branch" of the lyric poem. I would not. In a dramatic monologue, the speaker is a specifically defined fictional or historical persona, not the "I" of a lyric poem (the poet with a mask on). Also note that lyric poems are (usually) *non-narrative*, whereas dramatic monologues tell a story in a specific setting. These aren't hard and fast categories, but to lump lyric/dramatic poems together risks losing some important and useful distinctions.

## Narrative

Of these three genres, narrative poetry is the loosest and baggiest—the largest "umbrella." We're talking about poems that tell stories. *Epic* poetry is the most familiar and classical form of narrative poetry. Epic poems such as *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, *Gilgamesh*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Omeros*, or *Paradise Lost* tell stories at great length, often with a mythical hero journeying through a vast landscape and maturing into wisdom. They tend to use conventions such as *in medias res* (beginning in the middle of the story), an invocation of a god or muse. There are shorter versions of epic, sometimes called *epyllia*, of which Shakespeare wrote a couple ("Venus and Adonis"). Other examples of narrative poetry might include the *ballad*: a folk narrative written in simple ABAB rhyming stanzas, maybe a refrain that repeats itself with incremental variations that move things forward ("Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," "The Ballad of Birmingham," "Alice's Restaurant"). We can also include allegorical poems like Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, medieval romances like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, etc.

## Merging Genres

But wait a second: our friend the *Bedford Glossary* includes the ballad in the definition of lyric poetry! Which is it? Now we're getting somewhere. The revolutionary book of Romantic poetry, Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, associated the ballad form with local "folk" traditions that, for all their surface simplicity, spoke deep truths. Wordsworth and Coleridge thought that the language of the "common man" could rejuvenate the stuffy and elitist tendencies of 18th-century classicism. (I'm simplifying *quite* a bit.) So they drew on the ballad, a *narrative* form, while repurposing it to do the work of *lyric* poetry: the overflowing imaginative expression of feelings.

Why did they want to use ballads to do this work? For one, they're often childlike (ABAB rhyme schemes, etc.), and Wordsworth and Coleridge saw children as the expression of innocent human goodness, unspoiled by the stifling conventions of modernity.

Many of these complexities of genre are not unique to poetry—we’ll see more of them as we move through the course. Genres overlap, they branch into other family trees, etc. To quote the most lyric of lyric poets, Walt Whitman, “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then, I contradict myself. / (I am large, I contain multitudes)” (“Song of Myself”).



This worksheet developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# Scanning Poetic Meter: How, Why, and “So What”

Poetry is a rhythmic form of writing. **A poem's meter is the rhythmic push and pull between and within its words and syllables.** By scanning meter, we put language to the rhythmic ebb-and-flow from word to word, sound to sound—we can then understand how the poem's meter structures meaning. In short: analyzing meter helps us **interpret how a poem's rhythm structures its ideas.** It helps us to identify where the poem establishes and deviates from a pattern—these deviations often signal something going on in the poem's meaning.

In a classic book entitled *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, the late Paul Fussell wrote that a poem's first lines set up a “**metrical contract**”: an agreement with the reader that the rest of the poem will follow the same pattern. When the poem violates that contract, our ears perk up, and our brain does a little extra work, consciously or unconsciously.

This isn't a formal scansion class; we can take a few shortcuts. But as with any subject, the more concepts, vocabulary, and other tools you have, the more refined an approach you can take to the study of poetry.

**BUT DID THE POET MEAN TO DO THAT?** Well, probably, but in a way, it doesn't really matter. We aren't mind-readers, nor are we looking for a secret code that the poet hid in the poem. Rather, we're asking how a poem's rhythmic features shape its meaning. The question is: what is the *effect* of a particular rhythmic technique? When Frost substitutes a trochee for an iamb, there is a resulting effect. So if you notice something strange about a poem's rhythm, you should ask: what work is this rhythm doing? That question *always* produces new insights, which are pertinent whether the poet “meant to do it” or not.

Definitions:

- **Prosody**: Prosody is the study of rhythm in poetry.
- **Verse**: A line of poetry. Sometimes “verse” is used collectively, i.e. to describe several verses (“Dickinson's verse reflects...” etc.). **Versification** refers to how poetry is organized into lines.
- **Stanza**: A group of verses, set apart by a gap in the text.
- **Scansion**: the process of describing meter. Though some terms seem technical, scansion enables us to be more precise and concise: rather than writing “there are two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable, except for the fifth line,” etc., we can go straight to where the poem establishes or deviates from a pattern.
- **Enjambment/End-stop**: When a sentence or clause runs over from one line to the next, with no grammatical break or pause, we refer to that as “enjambment” (or “run-on line”). Most of the lines in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (and other poems) are enjambed:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit [no grammatical break]  
 Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste [no grammatical break]  
 Brought death into the world, and all our woe, [pause—not an enjambment]  
 With loss of Eden, till one greater Man [etc. etc....for a loooong time]

- “**End-stopped**” means that the end of a line corresponds with a grammatical break, as in these iambic-pentameter couplets from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*:

Nature to all things fix'd the Limits fit,  
 And wisely curb'd proud Man's pretending Wit:  
 As on the Land while here the Ocean gains,  
 In other Parts it leaves wide sandy Plains; [etc.]

- **Foot**: groups of syllables are divided by feet—essentially, a *beat* in a metered verse.
- **Predominant meter/Variation**: Scanning a poem's meter involves deciding what the predominant pattern is and then identifying where the poem deviates from that pattern.
- **Stressed/unstressed syllables**. A stress corresponds to a rise of pitch, volume, and intensity. A The word “syllable” (SYL-lab-le) contains one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed ones. Stresses and unstresses must be determined *in context*: the same word can be scanned differently in different lines.
- **Accentual-syllabic verse**. In accentual-syllabic verse, **we count both the number of accents (stresses) and the overall number of syllables**. Almost all English poetry works this way. Old English poetry followed *accentual* forms: you count the stresses, and you can have as many unstressed syllables as you want. Occasionally, modern English poets will mimic this effect: Gerard Manley Hopkins devised an accentual form of verse called “sprung rhythm”; Langston Hughes and Ezra Pound both experimented with accentual verse. So it’s useful to know that such a thing exists, for historical English-majority reasons, but the vast majority of English poetry is accentual-syllabic. The advantage of accentual-syllabic verse is that it describes not just how many syllables they are, but how they are *structured*.
- **Blank verse**: Unrhymed iambic pentameter. We'll get to this shortly.
- **Open Form/Free Verse**: Poetry that does not follow a set metrical pattern. I prefer the term “open form” because it prevents confusion between blank verse and free verse. **Blank verse has a fixed meter (iambic pentameter); free verse does not**. Even if there's no fixed meter, open-form poetry still has prosody, a rhythmic push-and-pull, that we can examine. For example, Walt Whitman's book-length free-verse poem *Leaves of Grass* begins with a line in iambic pentameter, and then explodes into open form:

u / u / u / u / u /

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

(This is a very Whitman move—starting with the “I” and extending out to the “you” in the great web of being. How is this move reflected in the meter—starting in blank verse, then expanding?)

- **Caesura:** A big pause in the middle of a line. For example, in the above quotation, one could mark a caesura after the first “myself.” This worksheet will not pay much attention to caesura, but if you notice big pauses, you can mark them with a double slash (/ /).

### How to Mark and Identify Scansion:

- Unstressed syllables are marked with a u
- Stressed syllables are marked with a slash.
- Feet are marked with a vertical line, placed at the end of each foot.

Take the following lines from W.B. Yeats's “The Second Coming”:

u / u / u / u / u /

The best lack all con vic tion, while the worst

u / u / u / u / u /

Are full of pas sio nate in ten si ty

There are five beats (“feet”), so we place a vertical line after each one:

u / | u / | u / | u / | u / |

The best lack all con vic tion, while the worst

u / | u / | u / | u / | u / |

Are full of pas sio nate in ten si ty

Some of these could be scanned differently: one could reasonably argue that “lack” is stressed, or that the final “ty” is unstressed. I erred on the side of conventional iambic pentameter, since we’ll be trying to get the hang of that meter, but in a different setting we might end up with a subtler result. **There may be multiple right answers—but there *are* wrong ones.** “CON-viction” or “convic-TION” are both wrong; “pas-SIO-nate” makes no sense.

Yeats plays with similar ambiguities in a different poem, “The Fascination of What’s Difficult”:

The fascination of what's difficult

Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent

Spontaneous joy and natural **content**

Out of my heart. [...]

Does he mean “conTENT” (happiness) or “CONtent” (subject matter)? Given the scansion and CONtent of the lines, the first one—”happiness”—is the more natural reading. To read it the other way would be difficult, but fascinating. Of course, it’s both. The tension *between* difficulty and spontaneity is what makes art; the meter reproduces those tensions.

In accentual-syllabic verse, meters are identified defined by two words:

Type of foot	Number of feet
e.g. Iambic	e.g. pentameter.

Terms for number of feet per line:

- Verse with two feet is described as *dimeter*
- Three feet = *trimeter*.
- Four feet = *tetrameter*
- Five feet = *pentameter*
- Six feet = *hexameter* (there’s more, but six is enough for now)

**Kinds of feet:** There are many, many others, but I’ll focus on a few major ones.

- Iamb/Iambic: unstressed followed by stressed (u /). **The vast majority of English poetry is iambic.**
- Trochee/trochaic: stressed followed by unstressed ( / u )
- Spondee/spondaic: two stresses ( / / )
- Anapest/anapestic: two unstressed + one stressed ( u u / )
- Dactyl/dactylic: stressed + two unstressed ( / u u )
- Pyrrhic: two unstressed ( u u ).

- A **feminine ending** is an extra unstressed syllable at the end of a line, which doesn't belong to any foot (a masculine ending is an extra *stressed* syllable—sorry, I didn't invent these terms!):

u / | u / | u / | u / | u / | u (fem ending)

To be or not to be: that is the ques tion;

For example, a line of four anapests, like Clement Moore's "Night Before Christmas," would be referred to as "anapestic tetrameter":

u u / | u u / | u u / | u u / |  
 'Twas the NIGHT be fore CHRIST mas and ALL through the HOUSE

Anapests have a cantering quality that makes them useful for poetry for/about children, such as Thomas Hardy's "The Ruined Maid" (note that the first foot of each line is iambic):

"O 'Melia, my dear, this does everything crown!

Who could have supposed I should meet you in Town?

And whence such fair garments, such prosperi-ty?" —

"O didn't you know I'd been ruined?" said she.

**Start with iambic!** The vast, *vast* majority of metered verse in English is iambic. This includes verse dramas (Shakespeare), epic poems in English (*Paradise Lost*), and major closed forms (the sonnet, villanelle, etc.). Yes, there are exceptions (like the Moore/Hardy poems). Again, since our job is to be ready to scan a poem when needed, we'll focus on the one you'll see most often: iambic. If you train your ear to recognize iambic verse, the exceptions will jump out at you.

**STRATEGY: START BY SCANNING A FEW LINES AND DETERMINING THE METER.** To determine where the exceptions are, we want to detect the predominant meter first. Don't be afraid to look like a dork: read aloud, stomp your feet, pat your leg, whatever helps you find the metrical beat.

**VARIATIONS/SUBSTITUTIONS:** Poems often break their "metrical contract" by varying the meter with what we call *substitutions*. Here's an example from Donne's Holy Sonnet 14. This poem, like all sonnets, is in iambic pentameter, but Donne complicates that meter starting with the first line. He can do this and still trust you to feel its iambic-ness, in part because it's a sonnet.

/ **u** | u / | u / | u / | u / |  
 Bat ter my heart, three- per son'd God, for you  
 u / | u / | **/ /** | u / | u / |

As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend



It's iambic pentameter, but Donne adds extra stresses, enforcing the sense of being battered, knocked around, pushed and pulled, remade by the divine. The first foot gives us a *trochee* (/ u) in place of the iamb we expect. We call this, then, a “**trochaic substitution.**” In the second line, third foot, there's a spondee (/ /): a “spondaic substitution.”

Another example, from Annie Finch's poem “In Cities, Be Alert”:

u	/		/	u		u	/		u	/		u	/	u	
You	may		hear	that		your	heart		beat	is		un	e	ven	
u	/		u	/		u	/		u	/		u	/	u	
and	let		new	ten		sion	climb		a	round		your	shoulders,		
/	u		u	/		u	/		u	/		u	/		
thin	king		you've	found		the	trick		for	go		ing	mad.		
u	/		u	/		u	/		u	/		u	/		
But	try		to	keep		a	grip		on	where		you	are.		

The first substitution comes on the word “hear.” Think about that! Finch(’s speaker) is talking to us about the senses, their sensitivity in the city where our bodies are most vulnerable, so the first sense named is also the first moment of unpredictability. The next variation comes on the word “uneven,” a feminine ending. Go ahead and think about that one for yourself! The first fully standard iambic pentameter line (4) arrives as we’re told to find a grip on our surroundings. I’ll be darned. The “new tension” of the poem’s own language is training us, in effect, to be alert to unsettling and destabilizing rhythms and sounds—including the sounds of our own bodies.

Did Finch do all this on accident? Well, suit yourself, but it seems like a lot of coincidences! The poem is what the poem is. (If we come up with something she didn’t intend, she won’t mind.)

**Strange Creatures:** You'll find some feet that don't fit our categories (cretics and amphibrachs and amphimacers, oh my!). A syllable or a foot may be missing: this is referred to as “catalexis.” I couldn't list them all here, even if I knew them all (which I don't). Good news: you can look up other terms when needed. Fussell's book *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* is a great resource.

**Starter Tips:** We don't need to “dumb down” our approach to meter, but we can also grant that this isn't a formal prosody class. So we can take a shortcut here and there. Remember to ask “so what?” The goal isn't just to describe the meter, but to interpret what it does.

1. Learn iambic pentameter and internalize its rhythm.
2. **Read the poem aloud two or three times.** What I generally do is read it once, relatively naturally, to get a first “estimate” of the general rhythm; then, a second time, in a dorky “Dr.

Seuss” way where I lay the words over the beat (revising my “estimate” if necessary); then a third or fourth time, like an actor, doing justice to the rhythm of the language without forcing stresses where they don't belong. If you're saying “But I don't have time to read a poem four times”—bologna. You do have time, and the poem is worth every second of it.

3. Active verbs are usually stressed (“knock,” “breathe,” etc.). Except when they aren't.
4. If you end up with three unstressed syllables in a row, it can help to treat the middle one as a “fake stress.” Three consecutive unstressed syllables occasionally happens—but again, for our “rough and ready” purposes, marking the middle one as a stress can help a pattern emerge. In the above Yeats example, we might want to scan “NATural conTENT” with three consecutive unstresses; treating “-ral” as stressed clarifies the line:

u / | u / | u / | u / (fake) | u or / / |  
 Spon ta neous joy and na tu ral con tent

Again, scanning a line is about figuring out its push-and-pull. Nobody says “nat-u-RAL,” but stressing that syllable makes logical sense in the context of the verse.

5. **Scan a few lines; determine the predominant meter; then go back and adjust.** If you know the predominant meter, you can often figure out a sticky line by starting with the last foot or two and work backwards.

At the risk of belaboring the obvious, remember: this isn't math! There are sometimes right and wrong answers (English majors aren't often used to that!), but don't forget that **scansion is a tool for interpreting the tensions and elasticities of poetry, not for deciphering its One True Message.** This isn't the Da Vinci Code!

**One more sample**, and then the exercises. Try to scan it on your own first, and then we'll chat. From John Keats's “Ode to a Nightingale.”:

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
 Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,  
 To take into the air my quiet breath; (51-54)

Pretty standard iambic pentameter. But if we look closely, we can see some push-and-pull:

/ u | u / | u / | u / | u u / |  
 Dark- ling I list- en; and, for ma- ny a time

u / | u / | u / | u / | u / |  
 I have been half in love with ease ful Death,

/ u | / / | u / | u u / | u / |

Called him soft names in ma- ny a mu- sèd rhyme

[You could scan “soft” either way. The accent over “musèd” tells us that it’s a two-syllable word.]

u / | u / | u / | u / | u / |

To take in- to the air my qui- et breath:

What substitutions can you find?

In the context of the entire ode, we might ask why the line about calling Death “soft names” in “rhyme” has so many variations in it, especially as the speaker yields his consciousness to the nightingale’s song. Is he abandoning his thirst for order as he falls in love with the disordered songs of Death and Nature?

Final tip:

SCAN POEMS BY HAND, WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

As I can tell you from making this worksheet, marking poetic scansion on a computer is an incredible pain in the ass. Marking up stresses and unstresses by hand also allows you to interact more flexibly with the line, to adjust your scansions as you read. (At times I even find myself unconsciously marking scansions in rhythm—kind of creepy, but means that the rhythm of the lines is being internalized.)

The exercises follow below.

**Fun website:** If you want more practice on your own, try the interactive website *For Better or Verse* (I’m not the only one who likes bad puns): <http://prosody.lib.virginia.edu>.

---

Some exercises follow on the next page. Depending on the format of the class, we’ll discuss these in person or on the forum.

# Practice Scansion Exercises

Scan the following passages, marking stressed syllables (/), unstressed syllables (u), and feet (|). Answer the questions below each passage. **Work each exercise completely.** Don't leave exercises blank just because they're confusing. That's not cool! Work at solving problems. Many of these are poems we're discussing in full, so we'll have more opportunities to think about the "so what" question.

(1)

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow

Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,

You cannot say, or guess, for you know only

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,

(T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*)

Predominant meter:

Variations:

Line One:

Line Three:

Line Two:

Line Four:

**(2)**

They beat him! They mauled him! They started to haul  
Him into his cage! But he managed to call  
To the Mayor: “Don’t give up! I believe in you all!  
A person’s a person, no matter how small!

(Dr. Seuss, Horton Hears a Who)

Predominant meter:

Variations:

Line One:

Line Three:

Line Two:

Line Four:

**(3)**

See how these masses mill and swarm  
And troop and muster and assail:  
God!—We could keep this planet warm  
By friction, if the sun should fail.

(Edna St. Vincent Millay)

Predominant meter:

Variations:

Line One:

Line Three:

Line Two:

Line Four:

(4)

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands  
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

(Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess")

Predominant meter:

Variations:

Line One:

Line Three:

Line Two:

Line Four:

(5)

honour corruption villainy holiness  
riding in fragrance of sunlight (side by side  
all in a singing wonder of blossoming yes  
riding) to him who died that death should be dead

(E. E. Cummings, Sonnet #63 from *Xaipe*)

Predominant meter:

Variations:

Line One:

Line Three:

Line Two:

Line Four:

(6)

**Scan the lines; also, mark enjambments with an E and endstopped lines with an S.**

Gentle breath of yours my sails  
Must fill, or else my project fails,  
Which was to please. Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be relieved by prayer[.]

(Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Epilogue)

Predominant meter:

Variations:

Line One

Line three

Line five

Line two

Line four

Line Six

(7)

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,  
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.  
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,  
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.  
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;  
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,  
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.

(Alexander Pope, from *Essay on Criticism*, Part II)

Predominant meter:

Variations:

Line One	Line Four	Line Seven
Line Two	Line Five	Line Eight
Line Three	Line Six	

Write five lines in iambic pentameter. **Include at least two substitutions total (put 'em anywhere you like).** After writing the lines here, scan them, circle the substitutions, and identify those substitutions.



This worksheet developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/), a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License.



# Quoting Poetry in MLA Literature Essays

**The purpose of quotation in a literature essay is to analyze the language of the text.** The technical elements of citation exist to help your reader to engage with your analysis and argument. This means it's important to **quote selectively**: don't quote long passages unless you plan to **analyze every word**. Stuffing an essay full of lengthy, undigested quotations makes it feel padded and frustrating to read.

1. In MLA, we cite poems parenthetically by last name and the **line number(s)** for the quotation, like this (Shelley 10-12). Note that the period goes *after/outside* the parentheses. **Do not place a comma** between the last name and the line numbers (NOT Shelley, 3).
  - a. If the poet is named in the sentence, or unambiguous in context, you can cite the line numbers and omit the name (3-4).
  - b. **If you've taken the poem from a longer book**, cite the line numbers in the text, then include the bibliographic information about the book in a Works Cited page.
2. In an in-text quotation from a poem, **indicate line breaks with a slash**: "In truth the prison, into which we doom / Ourselves, no prison is" (8-9). For longer block-quotations, see below (#6).
3. In an essay, you must **never drop a quotation**. A dropped quotation is when you leave a quotation standing alone in its own sentence. Here is an example of what NOT to do.

NO!: Wordsworth reflects on the sonnet's dynamics of enclosure and openness. "And hermits are contented with their cells" (2).

The quotation is stranded in its own sentence—ILLEGAL! Instant hellfire! Integrate the quotation into *your* sentence. If the set-up of the quotation is a complete sentence/thought, use a colon:

YES!: Wordsworth reflects on the sonnet's dynamics of enclosure and openness: "And hermits are contented with their cells" (2).

If the set-up of the quotation is a subordinate clause or an incomplete thought, use a comma:

YES!: Alliterating "n" and "r" sounds to connect the nuns to their environments, **Wordsworth writes**, "Nuns fret not in their convents' narrow rooms" (1).

You can also weave the quoted detail into the sentence, rather than starting a new clause:

YES!: Wordsworth's speaker clarifies his attitude toward the pagan gods of nature as he imagines "old Triton" playing his "wreathèd horn" (14).

In this last example, you do *not* need a comma before the quoted details. Unlike the previous examples, the quoted phrases don't mark a new clause or grammatical break. (Pretend that the quotation marks were invisible; if you wouldn't otherwise need a comma, you don't need one here.)

4. **Avoid writing “In line 34, Wordsworth writes,...” (or, for prose, “On page 33, Conrad writes”; etc.).** Instead, frame the *content* of the quotation, or the claim you're making about it; quote the text; and cite the line number parenthetically. (If the line number is meaningful, by all means include it—but usually, setting up a quote this way is merely clumsy and offers no relevant information.)
5. If you omit words in the middle of an in-text quotation, insert ellipses where the words are missing: three periods, with a space between . . . each one. Note: **you do not need ellipses at the beginning or end of the quotation**, since you can begin the quotation anywhere you want.
6. If you're quoting four or more lines of verse, you should *block-quote* the excerpt:
  - start the quotation on a new line;
  - indent the entire quote *½ inch* [one tab] from the left margin;
  - continue double-spacing the quotation;
  - Replicate the capitalization, line-breaks, and formatting of the original text.
    - You don't need slashes (/) in block-quotes, since we can see the line-breaks.
  - Block-quotations are not italicized, center-aligned, or enclosed in quotation marks.
  - Do not add extra space before or after the quotation.
  - In an in-text quotation (a normal short quotation), the final punctuation mark goes outside the citation, like this (4). In a block quotation, however, the citation goes outside the punctuation mark. (Sorry—I don't make the rules!)
  - If you omit words from a line, use ellipses . . . as indicated above.
  - This is pretty rare, but if you omit an entire line (or more), indicate the omission with an entire line of periods, evenly spaced to match the length of an entire line.

Imagine this quotation from an Emily Dickinson poem in an ordinarily double-spaced essay:

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –

The Stillness in the Room  
Was like the Stillness in the Air –

Between the Heaves of Storm – (1-4)

If you were to omit one entire line, it would look like this:

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –

The Stillness in the Room  
.....

Between the Heaves of Storm – (1-2, 4)

Note that the parenthetical citation has changed to indicate *exactly* what lines are being quoted. (This example is imperfect, since the quotation is now ungrammatical—I'm offering the example to show formatting, not because it's always a good idea!)

7. Again, once you quote from the text, ANALYZE WHAT YOU JUST QUOTED—pick specific details and put them under a microscope.



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# Quoting Fiction in MLA Literature Essays

1. The same basic principles apply for quoting prose fiction (novels, novellas, short stories, etc.) as for poetry: **don't drop quotations**, integrate them smoothly, avoid writing “On page 33, Brontë...,” and **only quote the parts you plan to analyze closely**.
  - For short, in-text quotations, integrate them and cite by page number: “Ah! but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares” (Conrad 139). If the quotation runs over a page break, cite the full range (139-140). <—Note that **in an in-text quotation, the final period goes after the parenthetical citation**.
  - In MLA format, we **do not** write “p.” or “pg.” in the citation. Just author and page.
  - **Do not** write a comma after the author's name (Brontë, 74).
  - **Do not** use slashes to indicate line-breaks—that's for poetry, not prose. (There *are* such things as verse novels, but let's not worry about that right now!)
2. If the author's name appears in the sentence, or if it is unambiguously clear from context whom you're citing, you can generally omit it in the citation and just cite the page (34).
3. For longer quotations (four or more lines), use block-quotation style:
  - **Indent ½-inch. The quotation runs to the right margin. Do not center-align or “squish” the quotation**—indent it at the left and run it all the way to the right.
  - **Continue double-spacing.** (Some professors may ask you to single-space block quotations—this is no longer standard in MLA, but it's an easy adjustment to make.)
  - **Do not skip lines** or add extra space before or after the quotation.
  - **No quotation marks**, unless they appear in the text itself (e.g. you're quoting dialogue).
  - In a block-quotation, the final citation appears *after* the final punctuation mark.

Here's a sample block-quotation, the ending of Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons*:

Can it be that love, sacred, devoted love, is not all-powerful? Oh, no! However passionate, sinning, and rebellious the heart hidden in the tomb, the flowers growing over it peep serenely at us with their innocent eyes; they tell us not of eternal peace alone, of that great peace of “indifferent” nature; tell us too of eternal reconciliation and of life without end. (352)

I omitted the author's name in the citation because it appears in the set-up of the quotation. Note that the word “indifferent” is in quotation marks only because those marks occur in the original text.



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# Quoting Drama in Literature Essays

Again, most of the same rules apply as for poetry and fiction: **never drop quotations**; integrate them smoothly; **only quote the parts of the text that you plan to analyze**; etc.

However, plays present a few specific formatting challenges, depending on what information you have. Plays formatted in acts, scenes, and lines (e.g. Shakespeare dramas) are cited by act/scene/line (1.2.343). For example, since *A Streetcar Named Desire* is written in prose and structured in eleven discrete scenes, citing only by scene number wouldn't help your reader much. So in this case it might help to cite by scene and page number. For example, a passage from scene 9, page 146, could be cited as (9.146). With drama it is especially important to have the correct edition cited in your bibliography; otherwise the citation refers your reader nowhere!

In short, use good judgment about what will help your reader locate the passage most efficiently, and **always feel free to ask individual instructors for their advice and guidance**, which may differ depending on the text and the course expectations. Remember—good writers can *adapt*.

As usual, if the playwright's name occurs in the same sentence as the quotation, or if it's unambiguous what you're citing, you may omit it in the citation, to avoid cluttering up the essay.

In-text (short) quotations:

1. Basically the same rules as usual: parenthetical citation after the quotation, and **the final punctuation mark after the citation**, like this: "Now let's cut the re-bop!" (2.40).
2. In a play that's written in prose, you don't need to worry about line breaks. Some plays, including much of Shakespeare (or parts of *Streetcar*), are written in verse or include snippets of song. **If a passage from a play follows a verse or song form, indicate line breaks with a slash and replicate the capitalization**: "Without your love, / It's a honky-tonk parade!" (7.121). Always treat verse like verse, prose like prose. It matters—a lot.

**Block quotations:** For quotations of four or more lines, provide a block quotation.

3. The usual: indent ½-inch (one tab), left-align, and continue double-spacing. In a block-quote, the final citation goes *after* the final punctuation mark.
4. If the excerpt is written in verse, treat poetry like poetry and replicate the line breaks. If the excerpt is in prose, indent the passage ½" at the left, and run it to the right margin:

My youth was suddenly gone up the water-spout, and—I met you. You said you needed somebody. Well, I needed somebody, too. I thanked God for you, because you seemed to be gentle—a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in! But I guess I was asking, hoping—too much! (9.147)

5. If you are quoting dialogue between two characters, things get a little messy. Again, you should do this **only if you plan on analyzing the full passage being quoted**.
  - a. Indent 1/2-inch (one tab), and type the first character's name in ALL CAPS.

- b. Begin the character's lines. When the next character begins speaking, start a new line (don't skip an extra line), with his or her name in all caps. Rinse and repeat.
- c. Here's the messy part. For every line of the quotation after the first, indent the text of the quote a quarter-inch past where the character's name begins (see passage below). This is called a "hanging indent"; if you're not sure how to do this, consult the Help menu on MS Word (or whatever program you use).
- d. Once the quotation is over, cite it.

Here's an extract from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* that combines poetry (Caliban's lines) and prose (Stephano's line). The start of each passage is indented ½ inch, and each following line is indented a further ¼-inch, with the citation *after* the final punctuation mark:

CALIBAN. Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments.

Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices

That, if I then had waked after long sleep,

Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,

The clouds methought would open and show riches

Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked,

I cried to dream again.

STEPHANO. This will prove a brave kingdom to me, where I shall have my music for nothing. (3.2.137-45)

Once more, with feeling: **don't quote such a lengthy passage unless you plan to analyze every word of it.** Generally, you're better off being more selective about what you quote.

Do what you can to replicate the formatting and punctuation of the original text.

Again, it never hurts to ask your professor what they would prefer.



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial)

# Sonnets: An Introduction

**A sonnet is a lyric poem of fourteen lines, written in rhymed iambic pentameter.** Some sonnets have stanza breaks, some do not. Sonnets are traditionally love poems, originating in Renaissance Italy with **Petrarch (1304-1374)**, whose sonnets explored topics of courtly love and longing. Later sonnets have continually revised that initial purpose. The sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett Browning play with Petrarchan themes from a female perspective; John Donne's *Holy Sonnets* use the language of sexual torment in address to the divine; Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth use sonnets to explore the power of nature on the imagination; Shakespeare's sonnets range across topics—love, sex, faith, doubt, and poetry itself. In Sonnet 130, Shakespeare parodies the worshipful tone of Petrarch's sonnets: "My mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun; / Coral is far more red than her lips' red" (1-2).

**The tightly structured form of the sonnet makes it perfectly suited for the pursuit of argument.** A sonnet develops an idea, or explores a paradox, in a logically rigorous but internally conflicted manner. Often, the logical rigor of the sonnet is used for the ends of romance ("Let me count the ways"). But the rigors of the form can put a complex or ironic twist on this persuasion: shedding light on the complexity of love itself, and creating potential for other modes of intellectual engagement.

Sonnets can, therefore, be used to reflect on poetry itself. John Keats's "On the Sonnet" uses the sonnet form to *criticize* other sonnets: mocking their "dull rimes" and "fetter'd" forms, Keats wants poets to innovate and find freedom *within* the sonnet form. Wordsworth's sonnet "Nuns Fret Not" compares the sonnet to a "plot of ground" that, paradoxically, frees us from the burdens of too much freedom. Sonnets, Wordsworth suggests, both confine (formally) and liberate (emotionally):

In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound  
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;  
Pleased if some souls (for such there needs must be)  
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
Should find brief solace there, as I have found. (10-14)

A quick "rough-and-ready" reading of Robert Frost's "Design" may help us discern the sonnet's potential for exploring natural beauty—and for turning back on (re-versing) its own status as a poem.

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,  
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth  
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—





**Rhyme:** The two stanzas are bound by the *a* rhyme (even the same word, “white” [1] and “white” [9]). The “design” of the poem thus implicates the questioner with the thing he is questioning—as if the sonnet’s tight-knit, internally referential design were compensating for the randomness of “death and blight” and the “small” purview of the speaker’s world (14). The desire for unity is a human construct, an effect of the mind’s impulse to create meaningful stories for random events. One might say this is a reason we crave literature—and forms like the sonnet—in the first place. Poetry is *always* about “design,” at least implicitly.

There’s lots more to say, but this is enough to highlight some features of the sonnet: (1) as a **lyric** poem, it explores the feelings or thoughts of a speaker, but (2) it **uses form to question, ironize, or unsettle that speaker’s initial idea**, and thus (3) works its tight-knit formal construction (rhyme, stanzas, meter, etc.) into the texture of the theme being explored, connecting the speaker to their subject. The sonnet uses argumentative functions of form and language to work through a complex question—often (not always) turning that question onto the form and function of poetry itself.

Soy loca con mi tigre: volta, volta, volta

A sonnet includes a **volta** (literally, a *turn*), corresponding to a shift in idea, tone, or form. The word “verse” literally means “turn”: poetry re-verses and in-verts ideas and words, turning them inside-out, refreshing their familiar meanings. The *volta* in a sonnet involves a change in direction. Perhaps the speaker reverses positions, or perhaps there’s a shift in voice or perspective. Often the volta is signaled by some kind of transition word (“But,” “And yet,” etc.). In the above Frost poem, the volta comes after the octave (line 8): we can see this because the rhyme scheme and tone change; because the speaker moves from declarations to questions; and because we get a stanza break (which some sonnets include and some don’t).

### Varieties of the Sonnet in English

The two main sonnet forms are the **Petrarchan** and the **Shakespearean**. I say “main,” not “only.” But most other sonnet forms in (English) poetry are variations or combinations of these two.

Sonnet genres are often altered in various ways—the above Frost poem is mostly a Petrarchan sonnet, but he tweaks it; Donne and Shelley and Yeats (oh my!) play a number of tricks with traditional sonnets.

- **Petrarchan** (or “Italian”): named after the aforementioned poet Petrarch. The Italian sonnet contains an **octave** and a **sestet**, with the following rhyme scheme:

**Octave** (first eight lines): *abbaabba*

~ volta ~

**Sestet** (second six lines): *cdecde* or *cdcdcd*

You may or may not get a stanza break between octave/sestet.

- The Miltonic sonnet is an adaptation of the Petrarchan sonnet, without stanza breaks, using enjambment to run ideas over lines and quatrains. This produces an interlocking effect where the poem reads as one evolving thought, enjambrin' in the name of the Lord.

Octave: *abbaabba* – lines enjambed (sentences run from one line to next)

~ No sharp volta after line 8; the volta often emerges gradually, starting around lines 8-9. ~

Sestet: *cdecde* – lines enjambed

Octave and sestet often enjambed (no stanza break between lines 8 and 9).

- **Shakespearean** (or “English”) sonnet, named after some English guy. The English sonnet contains three quatrains (with or without stanza breaks in between) and a couplet:

Quatrain 1 abab

Quatrain 2 cdcd

Quatrain 3 efef

~ volta ~

Couplet gg

The final couplet may resolve—or re-verse and ironize—the logic of everything before it. Take the couplet to Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116: “If this be error and upon me prov’d, / I never writ, nor no man ever lov’d” (13-14). The couplet exhibits a kind of circular reasoning—as if to say, “If the above is proven invalid, I’ve never written anything; and I wrote this poem, so it must be true!” It also ties the main theme (“the marriage of true minds”) to the “marriage” between speaker and poem. You could even argue that the poem’s “marriage of true minds” proves its own “impediment,” getting under the feet of its own reasoning. Because sonnets are so tight-knit, they’re full of potential for unraveling.

Learn the English and Italian sonnets well. Look for how these forms are changed and combined (and then ask “so what?”). For example, Donne’s Holy Sonnet 10 (“Death be not proud”) merges English and Italian forms: it has three quatrains and a couplet (Shakespearean), but a Petrarchan rhyme scheme. One has to ask where the volta is, or if there’s more than one. Frost’s “Design” takes the couplet from the English sonnet and maps it onto the Italian octave/sestet form (octave, volta, sestet). How is this final couplet part of—or separate from—the speaker’s search for a design? Also, the sestet restarts with the *a* rhyme (*abbaabba/acacaa*). How does this feed into the idea of “design govern[ing]”?

*Sonnet sequences*, lengthy sequences of sonnets that construct a narrative, e.g. Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* or D.G. Rossetti’s *House of Life*, create a new dynamic: how to balance the internal consistency of each sonnet with the narrative arc of the overall sequence.

## How to Approach a Sonnet

When reading a sonnet, it is helpful to ask the following:

- Keep asking the usual poetry questions: imagery, meter, poetic diction, figurative language, voice, theme, “sound and sense,” irony, etc. Sonnets are a special kind of lyric poem—but they are lyric poems and open to all the same questions.
- Who is the **lyric speaker**? How do the poem’s various “turns,” formal reversals, or subject changes complicate the role, persona, or position of the speaker? (In Shelley’s “Ozymandias,” we have *multiple* speakers, feeding into each other as the poem shifts and turns.)
- **What’s the rhyme scheme**, and does that cue us to what kind of sonnet we have?
- **Where is the volta**, and what sort of “turn” does this *volta* give us? A change in argument? A change in logic? A change in topic? How does the volta, or any other formal shift in the poem, change how we understand the speaker’s attitude toward the subject?
- Questions of **form**: Do we have octave+sestet? Quatrains+couplet? Are there stanza breaks? How does that final sestet/couplet sew up the sonnet’s argument or unravel it?
- Sonnets are in **iambic pentameter**. Where might the poet vary this meter? To what effect?
- Does the sonnet have a complex *argument*, or ask a complex unfolding *question*? What are its premises and conclusions? How does it use the form to work through a problem?
- Does the poem’s topic or theme relate, earnestly or ironically, to the genre’s original function: love poetry? How might Frost’s poem about death, or Donne’s poem about God, or Wordsworth’s poem about poems, etc. repurpose the traditional uses of the sonnet to express devotion or desire?



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# Discussion Questions on The House of Bernarda Alba

Choose two of the following questions, one from Part A and one from Part B. For each, write 1-2 paragraphs in response. Cite specific textual examples to develop your ideas.

## Part A

1. What do we begin to suspect about Adela in the second act? What do Poncia and Martirio suspect? At the end of the act, Adela reacts in a different way to the misfortune of Librada's daughter. What do you think that is?
2. When does Bernarda appear on stage in the second act? What effect does this have? Who is onstage before her, and what do they say?
3. In which season does the second act take place? What is the weather? Does this season/weather bring any changes to the town and its population? Describe.
4. When do music or poetry appear in this play, and in what context? What themes of the work do they help to develop?
5. How many times in the first two acts does Bernarda hit one of her daughters? Describe these moments. What might Bernarda's cane represent?

## Part B

6. When Dalí and Buñuel collaborated on the script of *Un chien andalou* ("An Andalusian Dog") in 1928-29, they decided to exclude any scene that could lend itself to rational explanation. They practiced "automatic writing," hoping to express images from the **subconscious**: the part of the human mental processes that, according to Freud, is normally censored or denied by the individual. Now, Lorca does not mean *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* as a product of automatic writing unimpeded by logic. When you read the play, however, do you detect an interest in subconscious "censorship" or repression of irrational and anarchic impulses? If so, what does this interest look like in Lorca's work? How is it represented on stage?
7. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, written by Sigmund Freud in 1900 and translated into Spanish in the 1920s, discusses how folklore, jokes, dreams, and neurotic fantasies often use houses or other architectural structures as symbols of the body. In the chapter on "Dream-Work," Freud writes, "Boxes, cases, chests, cupboards and ovens represent the uterus..., and also hollow objects, ships, and vessels of all kinds. Rooms in dreams are usually women...; if various ways in and out of them are represented, this interpretation is scarcely open to doubt" (Avon Edition, trans. James Strachey, 389). We can assume that Lorca, like Buñuel and Dalí [the directors of *Un chien andalou*], knew Freud's text. (It was popular reading among students in the dormitory where the three lived in Madrid in the early '20s.) In this context,

reflect on some possible connotations of the “house” (or similar spaces) in the title of the work, and on the space of the stage itself.

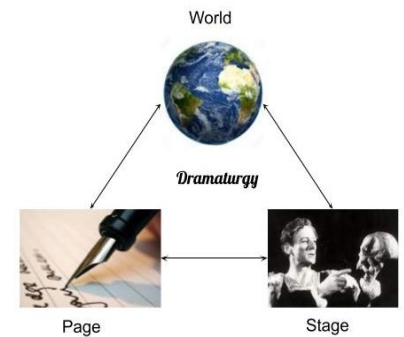


*Adapted from [handout](#) by Elizabeth Garrels, licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).  
Translated and adapted by Josh Epstein, Portland State Univ., 16 Sept. 2020m licensed under  
the same terms.*

# Dramaturgy: An Introduction

What is Dramaturgy?

A dramaturg is someone charged with researching a play—the social, historical, and biographical context; the performance history; and the text itself—in support of a dramatic production. The dramaturg helps the director and actors develop, and then enact, informed and purposeful interpretations. Of course, not every production strives to be a historically accurate costume drama. And views on “authorial intention” vary; some directors try to preserve the playwright’s vision, some see it as a “ground floor” for their own interpretations, and many do a little of both. But when directors and actors decide to be historically revisionary—or out of step with what the playwright envisioned—they want to do so *for a reason*. It’s important for them to have as much context as possible, so that they can make informed choices about how to bring the play to life. Dramaturgs also work on textual questions—translations, editions, pronunciation, etc. (Speaking of which, “dramaturg” is pronounced with a hard “g.”)



*"Dramaturgy Diagram" by Josh Epstein is licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)*

A few other takes—like so many of our terms, this one is a little slippery!

Adam Versényi, “Dramaturgy/dramaturg,” in [The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance](#):

A dramaturg is a person with knowledge of the history, theory, and practice of theatre who helps a director, designer, playwright, or actor realize their intentions in a production. The dramaturg—sometimes called a literary manager—is an in-house artistic consultant cognizant of an institution's mission, a playwright's passion, or a director's vision, and who helps bring them all to life in a theatrically compelling manner. . . . The dramaturgical sensibility begins by questioning received models of production or rehearsal, and seeks to enrich creation with critical, historical, sociological, ideological, and imagistic materials. It addresses itself towards a series of potential communities. Institutionally it helps develop, plan, and implement a theatre's mission. In service to the profession it seeks out, develops, and advocates for new plays, adaptations, translations, or styles of performance. Production dramaturgy looks for pathways into the world of the play and supports the work of the company. Educational dramaturgy enables local teachers to use the theatre to support their curricula and provides outreach to the broader community through seminars and symposia.

From [Appalachian State University's Department of Theatre and Dance](#):

A dramaturg[’s] main job is to help the director and production team make the best out of a play. It is the job of the dramaturg to **learn as much as possible about the play (its structure, its language, its themes, etc.) and the context surrounding its creation**, then to share that knowledge with the production team whenever and however it is useful. Dramaturgs often help directors develop the production concept and provide an extra set of educated eyes and ears during the rehearsal process to help the director effectively realize that concept. In the case of a new play, a dramaturg gives the playwright feedback during the revision process in order to help

the playwright achieve his or her goals for the play. Dramaturgs also strive to enhance the audience's experience of the play by developing supplemental interpretive materials like lobby displays, public websites, and program notes.

Amy Steele of the Educational Theatre Association [offers a detailed initial framework for what a dramaturg does](#). The dramaturg, in short, “illuminat[es] the world of the play” (Steele) through a mixture of close textual reading, in-depth contextual research, and collaboration with directors, actors, costumers, etc. Here is Steele's list, slightly redacted for brevity.

- **Meet with the director** to share thoughts about the play and develop a vision for it.
- **Read the play several times**. Still the most important part! Using our tools of formal and thematic analysis helps the dramaturg understand “the play's structure and style, its prevailing mood and tone, and the story's ambiguities and complexities” (Steele).
- **Create a text glossary**: defining dated words or vocabulary, pronunciation issues, as well as “references and allusions that need to be explained . . . ; unique social customs that require elaboration; and titles and character names that need to be analyzed” (Steele).
- **Research the playwright's background**: biographical context, specific facts relevant to the play itself, and maybe the playwright's larger body of work (common recurring themes, etc.)
- **Research the background of the play**. Is it an adaptation of a source text? Are there multiple editions (e.g. Folio and Quarto versions of Shakespeare), and if so, how do they differ? Are we working with a translation, and what translation issues exist? (This means a dramaturg may end up reading *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* in four or five different versions, ideally including the original.) When does the play take place, when was the play written, and what does that help us understand about what's on the page/stage?
- **Study the play's production history**. When, and under what conditions, was the play first performed? How was it received? Why did Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* start a riot? Why did the Nazis crack down on Brecht's *Rise and Fall of Mahagonny*? What would the audience in the Globe Theatre have looked like? Research might involve both primary and secondary sources: scholarly/academic essays, newspaper articles, contemporary accounts, interviews, etc. It might include the premieres as well as “updated”/revisionary performances—many directors will see their work as part of a larger genealogy or tradition of performances (whether to honor that tradition or to unravel it...).
- **Review other materials that reflect the world of the play**. Among these, Steele includes the following (see her [website](#) for fuller explanations and some revealing examples):
  - Art, music, and popular culture of the play's time period.
  - Timelines.
  - The work of a playwright's contemporaries.
  - Other artists that influenced the playwright.
  - Music and visual images that evoke the play's mood, tone, or theme.

- Video references.
- Maps and photographs of the play’s geographic setting.
- Magazines and newspapers from the time period in which the play is set.
- Children’s books.
- **Organize your research for presentation.** In other words, you know have piles and piles of material that you need to synthesize so that the director can read it and have it accessible. Steele describes this as a process of “distill[ing]” the information into packets distributed and discussed with the cast, while providing a larger “research library” backstage for any actors/directors/stage managers who want more information. Some dramaturgs also put together information for audience members: exhibits, program notes, videos, tours, etc.
- **Attend rehearsals.** The dramaturg wants to be there for some of the preparation, to ask and answer questions (and find out new questions!), gauge how the performance will “read” to an audience (e.g. if they need to alert the director that some specific aspect of the play is at risk of being lost in the production, and if so, what to do about it).
- **Get too little credit.** Steele doesn’t say this part, but sadly, dramaturgs are woefully under-acknowledged for the crucial work they do. But if you’ve ever seen a badly dramaturged play—one that makes no sense, has no coherence, is not just historically revisionary but plain historically ignorant—you know how important dramaturgy really is.

## Dramaturgy resources

Building on Steele’s list, updating the links (where possible) to PSU-accessible resources.

1. [Arts Journal](#), a “comprehensive reference for current events in all art areas”
2. [Arts Lynx International Theatre Resources](#). Timelines, dictionaries, miscellaneous links/tools.
3. *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*, edited by Susan Jonas, Geoffrey S. Proehl, and Michael Lupu (first edition), Wadworth Publishing, 1996.
4. *History of the Theatre* by Oscar G. Brockett (ninth edition), Allyn and Bacon, 2003.
5. [Lexis/Nexis Academic](#). Database with an extensive newspaper and legal archive.
6. [Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas](#). Group for dramaturgs, with an informative website and lots of [resources](#).
7. [MLA Bibliography](#). A thorough bibliographic database found in most libraries.
8. [Theatre Communications Group](#); publishes [American Theatre](#) and other resources.

To this list I would add a few:

- PSU library guide designed for the [Theater and Drama](#) program
- Mary Luckhurst, [Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theater](#) (online book through PSU library)



- [\*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance\*](#) has a good entry on dramaturgy.
- Lori Ricigliano, Univ. of Puget Sound, "[Dramaturgical Research](#)"



This worksheet developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# Narrative Voice in Prose Fiction

Students new to the study of literature often find it odd that we spend so much time talking about narrators, or that we tie ourselves in such knots to avoid conflating the author with the narrator. In the Will Ferrell movie *Stranger than Fiction*, some fun is poked at a character who's writing a dissertation about novels that use "Little did he know..." as a formal device. This may seem pedantic, but it's a perfectly useful thing to study: this device, and others like it, might serve as ways of foreshadowing, of disclosing knowledge to the reader that a character doesn't have, a way of establishing the power or personality of the narrative voice itself, etc.

In general, we refer to poems as having "speakers," while novels/ stories have "narrators." Lyric poems, anyway, are non-narrative, so the word "[narrator](#)" doesn't apply. (When faced with epic/narrative poems, we might stray from this usage.)

As we discussed some weeks ago, one of the basic things that literature often does is *tell a story*, and when we think about that story, we also have to ask some questions about the telling:

1. Who tells it? Is the person telling the story also a participant in its events? Are there multiple narrators, and if so, how do (or don't) they interact?
2. **Does the narrator change or is it static and unchanging?** Does the identity of the narrator change, or the time and place of the narration? Does it learn along with us?
3. In what **tone(s)** do narrators narrate? Are they "above the fray," commenting on events and characters, speaking about them with irony or affection? Do they speak in a scholarly or authoritative voice? With excitement and investment in the action?
4. **Does a character speak in first person ("I")?** If so, how—what do we learn from the narrator's self-awareness that they're telling a story? (Or, as in a dramatic monologue, does the character's voice reveal any hidden truths?)
5. **Does the narrator "zoom in"** and show us the world through individual characters' eyes, or does it speak from a distance? Is the narrator omniscient (all-knowing) or limited? How does the narrative reveal the extent of their knowledge? What tensions or ironies are produced for the reader by discrepancies between narrator and character ("Little did he know...")?
6. **Is the narrator reliable?** Do we have reason to trust or distrust what they say, based on internal contradictions, attitudes, or (if the narrator is also a character) the things they do? Don't go overboard here—it is *not* the case that we should distrust every narrator! Some people learn about unreliable narrators and start assuming that every book has one. But it's a good question to ask, if you have a textual basis for asking it.
7. **Is the narrator intrusive?** Does the narrative voice disrupt the progression of the storyline, or assert a strong personality/presence? Does it address us directly? Is the effect of this jarring, rhetorical, dogmatic? How does it shed light on what the text is doing?
8. Through what techniques does the author establish their narrators? For example, if we're allowed to see into people's heads, how does the author show it: through punctuation,

chapter breaks, typography, dialogue “tags,” etc.? In *Wuthering Heights*, which employs a “nesting doll” structure (narrative within narrative within narrative), Emily Brontë uses various forms of storytelling—letters, diaries, gossip, etc.—to “nest” different stories within each other, and thus to create irony and instability as we decide which of these (if any) to trust.

To ask these questions, it helps to have some “shorthand” for narrative forms and techniques:

- **Focalization** is a fancy word for “point of view,” emphasizing how narrative perspective selects, restricts, and frames the reader’s knowledge. Coined by Gerard Genette, the term “focalization” may summon up the image of a lens or camera. So think about what cameras do: they zoom in and out, they selectively frame a certain piece of reality (and, thus, exclude whatever’s outside of that frame). In some contexts they imply, explicitly or implicitly, that what we’re seeing is aligned with the subjective experiences of a specific character—that we’re getting not a neutral or objective view of the world but one that is *mediated* in a complex way. For a detailed discussion of focalization, take a look at [The Living Handbook of Narratology](#), which lays out three degrees of focalized POV:
  - zero (omniscient narrator),
  - internal (the narrator only tells us what is known by a specific character), and
  - external (the narrator tells us *less* than the character knows).
- **Direct/Indirect Discourse**. These are terms not only for who is telling the story, but to help us identify the writer’s *technique* for handling narrative voice. Easier to see than to explain, so here are some examples.
  - **Direct discourse** happens when a character’s words or thoughts are indicated with quotation marks. This is the most explicit and easiest to spot, and creates a clear division between the narrator and the thinking/speaking character.
    - EXAMPLE: Michael ran to the bathroom, and thought, “Who used up all the paper towels? My life is so miserable!”
  - **Indirect discourse**: here, the *character’s* thoughts are indicated in the *narrator’s* voice. The author is focalizing the narrative through a character’s POV while preserving the separation between character/narrator.
    - EXAMPLE: Michael ran to the bathroom. He was unclear as to who had used up all the paper towels, and felt his life miserable.
  - **Free indirect discourse**. This one’s the most subtle and slippery: we get a shift into the character’s thoughts, *without* a clear demarcation of where the narrator stops and the character begins. We are hearing the character’s thoughts, without quote marks or a signal phrase, often with a stylistic or tonal shift that blurs the boundary between the author’s voice and the character’s. As [Ann Van Sant notes](#), FID “allows a writer both to maintain the ‘public,’ ‘objective’ stance of the 3rd-person narrator and to create a sense of the interior life of characters.”
    - EXAMPLE: Michael ran to the bathroom. Who had used up all the paper towels, and why was his life so miserable?

- **Stream of consciousness:** we are plunged into a character’s brain, reading their thoughts and feelings as they occur. Stream-of-consciousness texts emphasize the *associative* aspects of thought: how external observations affect our internal states of mind, how we shift from topic to topic, and how unconscious thoughts are not always within our own control. Here’s a passage from Virginia Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness story “The Mark on the Wall”:

But as for that mark, I'm not sure about it; I don't believe it was made by a nail after all; it's too big, too round, for that. I might get up, but if I got up and looked at it, ten to one I shouldn't be able to say for certain; because once a thing's done, no one ever knows how it happened. Oh! dear me, the mystery of life; The inaccuracy of thought! The ignorance of humanity! To show how very little control of our possessions we have—what an accidental affair this living is after all our civilization—let me just count over a few of the things lost in one lifetime, beginning, for that seems always the most mysterious of losses—what cat would gnaw, what rat would nibble—three pale blue canisters of book-binding tools? Then there were the bird cages, the iron hoops, the steel skates, the Queen Anne coal-scuttle, the bagatelle board, the hand organ—all gone, and jewels, too. Opals and emeralds, they lie about the roots of turnips. What a scraping paring affair it is to be sure! The wonder is that I've any clothes on my back, that I sit surrounded by solid furniture at this moment. Why, if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour—landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair!

Yep, our main character sees a mark on a wall, and starts speculating about the history of that mark and that wall, what they remind her of, the life she’s led and sensations she’s had, and how random, fleeting, “accidental,” and unpredictable our thoughts (and the world that produces them) can be. The track of thoughts helps us to see the cognitive workings of one character, but Woolf keeps us aware of how that character’s thoughts are wired into the social and historical texture of her surroundings.

Stream-of-consciousness writing is often hard to read (and, yeah, maybe a little slow). Authors often represent internal consciousness by breaking down conventional norms of sentence structure—since our unconscious doesn’t always work in tidy sequences of subject+verb+object. Molly Bloom’s monologue at the end of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* comprises four unpunctuated sentences over a span of some seventy pages; rather than a clear sequence of thoughts, Joyce makes us process a stream (more like a cascade) of thoughts from a character who, up till this last chapter, has been understood only through other focalized (male) perspectives and streams of consciousness.

More online resources:

- [The Living Handbook of Narratology](#) (a bit advanced, but full of juicy stuff)
- [Module on Narratology from Purdue University](#)
- [A short and useful clarification of direct, indirect, and free indirect discourse](#) from Ann Van Sant (UC-Irvine), with Jane Austen as the principal example.



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](#), a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License.

# Thinking About Adaptation

## Concepts, Keywords, Questions

In English classes, we spend a lot of time reading, viewing, and maybe even writing your own adaptations: film adaptations of books, book adaptations of other books, pastiches and parodies that transform a story from one medium to another. What sorts of arguments can we make, and questions can we ask, about these adaptations? What changes when we adapt something to a new format, medium, or genre? Is the book always better than the movie? (No.)

- **It's not always about "better" or "worse," or about "faithfulness" to the original.** These arguments are worth having, but don't let them stifle richer conversations about the work an adaptation does, the elements of the original text that it buries or brings to the surface, and to what effect. Rather than have a friendship-ending fight over whether *Easy A* is better than *The Scarlet Letter*, whether Verdi's *Macbeth* or Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* improves on Shakespeare's play, or whether a cover version supersedes the original, you may **come to see both texts in a new light.**
- Think about adaptations *as interpretations*, which are meaningful in their own right, and which help you rethink the "source text" in new ways. A provocative adaptation returns you to the original text with fresh perspective. Someone adapting a text is offering you a "reading" of that text: a selective vision of what the text has to say, what traits are most thematically or aesthetically or historically interesting, and what will be accomplished by reimagining those traits and giving them new texture. It may not be (probably *won't* be) the same as your interpretation, or the one you discussed in your English class. So a good starting point can be to ask, how does this text "read" or interpret the original? What is its "take" on the text? What problems does it see the original text trying to solve or raise; what problems does it try to solve or raise in its turn?

Not every adaptation comes with a "thesis statement" attached, but they wouldn't be adapting the original text if they didn't see it doing some meaningful (and unfinished) work, or starting a conversation that benefits from being extended.

- **Build from basics.** As you think about two texts *comparatively*, don't lose sight of the basic questions you ask of *each text individually*. If a poem is adapted into a novel, you want to think about what makes a poem a poem (poetic voice, versification, meter, etc.) and what makes a novel a novel (narrative form, POV, characterization, setting, prose style, etc.) —so that you can think about what is changed, preserved, etc.
  - **Talk about FORM.** You can certainly talk about plot and character, and you should. These things matter, maybe more than anything else! But our job is also to think about *how* texts are constructed. In their operatic adaptation of Melville's *Billy Budd*, Benjamin Britten (composer) and E. M. Forster (librettist) turn a character, Vere, into the "frame narrator" and give him the final word. Very different from Melville's text, and yet a transformation of the novel's eccentric narrative voice. John Cheever's short story "The Swimmer" distends and manipulates the passage of time in moving ways; does the film version? Maybe,

maybe not, maybe it doesn't but distorts a different element of POV or tone to a similar effect. Again, the point is not to prove that the adaptation is good/bad, but to think about what's changed and preserved.

- **Go beyond the linear.** When you're reading/watching an adaptation, some aspects of it will be straightforward: X is changed to Y, Z stays the same, etc. But other elements may be ignored, amalgamated, or distorted in a way that requires more patient working-out. One example is the sci-fi film *Forbidden Planet*, which is very loosely based on *The Tempest*. Some characters are easy: Dr. Morbius = Prospero, and that's a wrap. But others are more subtle: the mysterious monster, for example, blends various elements of Caliban, Sycorax, the island itself. Without easy 1:1 correspondences, you'd want to develop patient, text-based readings of both play and film to consider what these changes accomplish (and what they might reveal anew in Shakespeare's play).
- **Intertextuality** is a term for how texts borrow from, engage with, respond to, or otherwise latch onto other texts. That is, we use this word when thinking about texts as interwoven. Just to identify a few quick examples. Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), about the Vietnam War, is based on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1901), about the horrors of Belgian imperialism in the Congo. You also see/hear, in this film, lines from T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men," a modernist poem that uses Conrad as its epigraph. Onscreen you see copies of Eliot and of Jessie Weston's book *From Ritual to Romance*, a comparative study of mythology both Eastern and Western, which influenced Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. In the film's most famous scene, a troop of helicopters flies to the music of Richard Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyrie*, which is based on many of the legends studied in Weston's book (and, likewise, an influence on Eliot). This same music is used in D.W. Griffith's horrifyingly racist film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), and though Coppola claims not to have known this (we'll take his word for it), it's hard not to see resonances between his depiction of an invading army and Griffith's depiction of the KKK (the historical merits of comparing these is for another day!).

We could go on for hours on any of these intertextual connections: some conscious and some not, some directly pertinent to the themes of the film and some that might require more time and excavation. They all call attention to the intertextual relationships among the film and its source texts—and, as you plunge down the rabbit hole, to think about how our discourses and frames for talking about imperialism, war, race, etc. are themselves propped up by a wide range of literature, film, music, etc.

- **Is all literature "intertextual"?** This term has been especially influential in forms of literary and criticism (popularly known as *deconstruction* or *post-structuralism*) that sees language itself as "intertextual": in other words, for critics who believed that all texts are by definition grounded in the existence of other texts, that literature is an expansive and "decentered" web of texts and signs. We don't have to go down that rabbit hole now, but it's worth thinking about. What texts *don't* engage, at least implicitly or unconsciously, with texts that have come before them? And what *interpretations* of texts don't somehow involve us in thinking about texts alongside contemporary works, historical discourses, etc.?

- **Remediation.** The media critics [Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin](#) use the term “remediation” to describe how new media, when transforming or updating older media, retain some of their features. For example, computers retain the organization and vocabulary of the typewriter keyboard (“tab,” “return,” etc.). This is also true in various art forms: animated/CGI films imitate classical film cinematography, trying to approximate the effects of zooming and panning and editing even when they don’t have to.

When thinking about an adaptation across media, then, you can compare the media themselves. The Barbara Stanwyck film *Sorry, Wrong Number* is based on a radio play: what happens when we can see what’s on screen vs. when we can’t? What historical or sensory relation does film have to the medium of radio (they emerged contemporarily)?

If you want to go beyond thinking about the form and content of the adapted/adapting texts and delve into the properties of the media themselves, this concept can provide useful leverage. Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula* has been adapted into other novels, radio plays, films, film adaptations of other films, comic books, etc.—and the original text is itself *obsessed* with how media such as typewriters, wax cylinders, diaries, etc. transform—might we say “transfuse”?—information from one body to another.

So we might say that Stoker’s *Dracula*, a novel *about* remediation, is adapted into other texts, many of which are remediated or adapted in their turn. Does the fun *ever* stop?!

(For more information on this concept, see [FutureLearn](#), or Bolter/Grusin’s interesting and readable book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* [1999].)



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).



# Analyzing Film

## A Few Terms and Concepts for “Reading” Film in a Literature Class

Many of the questions we ask about film are the same as the questions we ask about literature: questions about plot, narrative structure, character, theme, symbolism, etc. However, films are not novels: they have techniques and strategies of their own. And since we’ve learned that *form* is essential to understanding *meaning*, we have to talk about the specific things that make movies formally different from literature, even as we analyze them in dialogue with written texts.

Here are some strategies to watch for as you analyze a film, and some terms you’ll want to employ.

- **Shot:** a shot refers to an uninterrupted run of the camera. Shots are then **cut** together by the director. A shot is the basic unit of film—it is sometimes compared to the sentence in a written text, the essential unit of meaning. Shots can take a long time or a short time; they can be fast or slow; they can be **close up** or **far away** or in between; they can be **low-angle** (looking up at someone/ something) or **high-angle** (looking down). We might have a clear line of sight or an obstructed line of sight. All of these things matter! For example, a long shot can be used to establish landscape and setting—a close up can be used to emphasize a specific reaction or psychological effect of an action.
  - Remember one of our narrative terms: *focalization*. This is a lit-crit term borrowed from film. It can help to think of the camera as something that frames *perspective*, or where the narrative’s center of knowledge might be.
- **Editing:** Editing refers to how we transition between shots. Are the edits abrupt or smooth? Do we move between them quickly? Do they create a sense of *continuity* or *discontinuity*? Also, there are fancy kinds of cuts you may notice—wipe-cuts, jump cuts, dissolve cuts, iris cuts, etc. If this were a film class, we’d spend more time on this! For our purposes, if you notice something, describe what’s happening and speculate on why it matters.
- **Cinematography:** camera movement and lighting. (Literally means “movement-light-writing.”) How does the movement of the camera frame the action? Is the camera stationary or mobile? Is lighting bright or dark; low-key (lots of shadow/contrast) or high-key (shiny, not much contrast)?
- **Mise-en-scène** (MIZ uhn SEHN) – the layout of the scene in front of the camera: costumes, blocking of actors, props, foreground/background, color, empty space, etc. Think about how the “stage” is set and arranged, visually and spatially, in a given scene.
- **Frame.** A frame is a still image. If you hit the “pause” button, you’re looking at a frame. You can then analyze the *composition* (visual/spatial arrangement) of that frame, as if it were a painting.
- **Diegetic vs. Non-diegetic:** *Diegetic* elements are present in the story-world of the film. For example, a diegetic sound is a noise that happens inside the film; the characters can hear it, it’s produced by some object represented on camera, etc. A *non-diegetic* element, therefore, is *not* part of the film’s “universe,” but is used to comment *on* the action. For example, a

musical score to a film is generally non-diegetic, because the characters can't hear it; it's there to help the audience process the tensions and emotions of what's going on. (In musicals, it can be hard to tell—do the characters know that they're singing? Thinking about this question can open useful interpretive inroads!)

- **Sound:** Listen as well as watch. Does the film use sound effects? Does it use a musical score? How does sound amplify (<--ha, ha) the tensions or events being represented? How does the film balance diegetic and non-diegetic sound?
- **Montage:** a montage is a sequence where shots are cut together in a way that slows up/speeds up diegetic time. E.g. in *Rocky*, when he goes to train—six months of diegetic (story) time pass in ten minutes of film time.
- **Special effects.** This is a broad “umbrella term” for mechanical or technological devices used to create appealing audio-visual spectacle or to simulate some element of the film’s diegetic universe that could not be simulated merely through live acting. These are as old as film itself—the earliest “trick films” of Georges Melies, from the first decade of the twentieth century, were designed precisely to show us what the new technology could do (this is the legendary filmmaker paid homage in Martin Scorsese’s 3-D film *Hugo*). We might be talking about use of models and wires and puppets, use of animation and CGI, manipulations of sound and color, etc.: special effects can be used to make the film look more realistic and “naturalistic” or to make it look more spectacular and other-worldly (or, as in the case of Kubrick’s *2001*, both?).

With these terms in hand, you can proceed to ask a lot of the same questions that you’ve learned to ask already: about [narrative form and perspective](#), context, [adaptation](#), etc. You merely have more and different tools for engaging with these same questions, and moving between a film and a written text requires adjusting your terms and applying them carefully.



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# Traction and Pivot: Using Critical Sources in Literature Essays

In academic writing, we use critical sources to develop context for *our* arguments. When you employ a critical source in an essay, your job is to *build off of* that source in developing your own claims. This requires you clearly to identify the "moves" between the source's ideas/terms and your own. Using the move I call "Traction and Pivot" (T&P), move, we start by sinking our cleats into the source, then pivot into our own argument and analysis.

- **Take careful notes:** don't just cherry-pick for one quote you can use. We have a responsibility to our audience—and to the scholars whose work we're using—to know what we're talking about. Read closely and absorb the content of the source with as much care and depth as possible.

Be careful to distinguish when you are transcribing someone's exact words and when you're paraphrasing. Sloppy note-taking can lead to plagiarism problems.

- **Don't get drowned out.** On one hand, you want to explore the topic in its full complexity. On the other hand, you want your own argument to be at the forefront. If your entire essay is a fabric of quotations from other people, it's going to be hard to generate your own voice. One good tactic is to introduce your sources in the form of **clear, rigorous, fair-minded paraphrases**—bring in juicy quotations when they really clarify a point, but cover the major topics in your own words.
- **T&P: Engage with the substance of what the critic says and then pivot into your own argument.** Summarize the source fairly and thoroughly (and quote it selectively); get your hands dirty with its claims; and then offer your own development of the idea. As you pivot, *situate* the source in relation to your argument. Don't just "plop in" a quote and move on—*engage with* the source; *build on* its ideas. Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein call this move "They Say/I Say":

While Critic X argues that \_\_\_\_\_, I argue that \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>1</sup>

While Critic X persuasively argues that \_\_\_\_\_, closer examination of \_\_\_\_\_ reveals (something Critic X doesn't see).

Critic X's argument that \_\_\_\_\_ does not adequately account for \_\_\_\_\_.

If one considers (another scene/theme/context), Critic X's claim that \_\_\_\_\_ has an additional implication: \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup> I am ok with using "I" in moderation as a way of distinguishing your views from others'. Make arguments, don't just spout off. Rather than tell me what you "personally believe," *demonstrate* your claims with evidence.

- **Argue with ideas at their *strongest* points.** Disagreement and critique are crucial, but insulting, misrepresenting, or oversimplifying someone else’s argument will make your argument *less* convincing, not more. Moreover, deeming a critic “confusing,” complaining about the writing style, etc. is not informative (even if you're right). A good debater can articulate their opponent's position better than the opponent can. If you don't like how the critic writes, paraphrase the ideas in your own, better words. (Paraphrasing is a good idea anyway, for reasons explained above.)
- **You don't need to write out the full article information in the text:** "As Roger J. Williams says in his article ‘Monkfish Ecologies in *Moby-Dick*,’ published in the 2008 *Journal of Literary Literariness*,..." That's 20+ wasted words. In the text, simply name the critic and get into the *content*: "As Roger Williams argues, monkfish signify..."; then save the rest for the Works Cited.
- **Format quotations correctly!** Don’t drop quotations; integrate them elegantly into your prose.
- If you use automatic citation generators, double-check the format of every citation.

### Researched Writing Exercises

We may or may not be doing this exercise in our specific section of ENG 300. If we do, I’ll give further instructions in class. If we don’t, the exercise may still prove useful for you independently.

For this exercise, you will need the following:

- The texts you plan to write about.
  - A couple research sources, along with
    - Brief synopses/paraphrases of the sources in your own words
    - A couple “juicy” quotations from each source, with page references
    - Correct MLA citations for each source
1. What might you be writing about for your essay? (If you haven't decided yet, fake it till you make it.)
  2. **Traction:** Pick **one** of the sources. Take a look at the synopsis of the source that you've written. (If you'd like to tinker or change anything, feel free, but don't get too obsessive right now.) Off the cuff: how might you be able to use this source in your essay? Does it make a particular argument, offer a close reading, present some useful historical or theoretical context, that you can build on? *How do you think you might be able to engage with the ideas of this source productively*—what information, argument, or context will be helpful for complicating or developing your own argument?
  3. **Pivot:** How do you plan to *build on*, revise, develop, challenge, or redirect that source? In other words, how do your own ideas about the text/topic *differ* from or *add to* the source? This doesn't have to be a matter of entirely disagreeing with the source; you may merely want to *reapply* its ideas or arguments in a different context. In short: what will your essay do to take this source someplace new?

4. Write 2-3 claims using the formulae below. (Try as many as you like!) You aren't required to use these formulae word-for-word in your essays. Indeed, you can probably do better! The point is to practice the **moves** involved in pivoting from a source into your own ideas. (Try to connect your claims back to the thesis/topic from #1—but also use these moves to help develop your topic further.)
- Although [Critic X] is right to argue that   [#1]  , this argument fails to account for   [#2]  ; closer examination of   [#2]   allows us to see that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - If it is true that \_\_\_\_\_, as Critic X argues, then we can better understand that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - While focusing on   [topic/theme/technique]   allows Critic X to argue that \_\_\_\_\_, contrasting this to [different topic/theme] complicates our reading, showing us that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - [Critic X] focuses on the topic of \_\_\_\_\_, arguing that \_\_\_\_\_; this argument applies equally to an analysis of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Because [Critic X] argues \_\_\_\_\_, this implies that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - [Critic X] argues \_\_\_\_\_ about [Text #1]; if we consider this argument in relation to [Text #2], we might be able to see that \_\_\_\_\_.

**TIP:** Most of these examples use *subordinating conjunctions* (While, Although, Because, Whereas, etc.). Subordinating conjunctions are useful for "pivoting," because [*<--see?*] they show logical *relationships* from point to point; we get to see how the source is building into your own argument. [The technical term for this is *hypotaxis*: subordinating one clause to another. This is also a good strategy for transitions/topic sentences, not merely making a list of things, but showing a complex hierarchy of ideas: "Whereas Caliban shows us X about power/colonialism, Ariel shows us Y."]

Move to Source #2.

Now we're going to start practicing the use of selective quotation and paraphrase.

5. Take one of the juicy quotations you selected from this source. Briefly explain why you found it intriguing or worth quoting. Perhaps it offers a particularly succinct or well-phrased account of the argument? Says something particularly complex or smart about the text/issue? Offers a useful piece of evidence, context, data, etc. that helps recontextualize the work of literature? Something else?
6. Look back at your synopsis of that source. Briefly characterize, as best you can, how this quote fits into the larger essay. Is it the critic's main thesis? A supporting point? A useful example that helps develop a particular nuance? A caveat (i.e. a hedge in the argument)?
7. While it's ok to quote sources directly, you should do so *selectively*—it's not a good idea to stuff a paper full of long quotations. In what situations might this passage be useful to quote (in part) in your essay? What would quoting directly add to your argument that a paraphrase would not?

8. **Traction:** Try a couple of the following; **practice both *paraphrase* and *quotation*, and a mix of the two.** If you decide to quote from the source, you don't have to use the whole quotation; you certainly don't want to "cherry-pick" in a way that misrepresents the argument, but you should be selective. **Cite the page of each specific claim correctly, whether paraphrasing or quoting.**
- [Critic Y] suggests [paraphrase], arguing that "quote" (cite).
  - Pointing us to moments of the text where \_\_\_\_\_, [Critic Y] argues that "quote" (cite).
  - Critic Y complicates our understanding of [topic], arguing for [paraphrase claim in your words]: "quote that offers critic's own useful terminology/phrasing" (cite).
  - Addressing [topic/text] in the context of \_\_\_\_\_, Critic Y suggests that [paraphrase/quote] (cite).
9. **Pivot:** Now, try another pivot move. (You don't have to cram it all into one sentence.) You've engaged with source #2 carefully, through quotation and/or paraphrase. Now, how might you build on, extend, develop, redirect, or argue with that critic? Feel free to use the "moves" offered above, or to come up with one of your own. (Use a subordinating conjunction, if you can.)

**Pull the sources together.** How do they speak to a similar issue, or build a conversation about the texts in question? What larger trends or debates do they both speak to, in similar/different ways? (This might not always work perfectly; for the purposes of the exercise, find your inner Tim Gunn and make it work!)

Example: While Aaron Rodgers and Susan Lucci both discuss Shakespeare's use of magic in the context of Renaissance science, Lucci focuses on the humanistic values of discovery and mastery over nature, whereas Rodgers emphasizes the supernatural elements.

Last but not least: **Back to the texts!**

10. Return to the texts, and find some specific examples, passages, *language* that you might use to help with the Traction/Pivot moves above. Particular scenes that show a different angle on the topic? That develop a similar theme but in a different light? That the critic quotes/analyzes but that you would like to read differently? Try to come up with at least 3-4 from each text.
11. Pick one of these scenes and take one last opportunity to do some good **close reading**. Note any details of language, imagery, symbolism, phrasing, meter, rhyme, form, POV, tone, etc. that you could analyze closely. (The next step would be to think about how that close reading would help develop your argument. But start by just jotting down some details that can help.)



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).

# After 300: What Comes Next?

Whew! We made it! You are now experts in Literary Form and Analysis. Thank you for your hard work this quarter; I hope you have learned a lot.

But we're not done yet! It is useful to reflect on how you plan to build on and apply what you've learned, once you've escaped my evil clutches.

People take ENG 300 for a lot of reasons. Most, but not all, are English majors and minors using it as a prerequisite for more advanced literature, writing, rhetoric, and publishing courses. (That list alone speaks to the wide variety of paths that lie ahead.) Some are taking the class to brush up on their writing skills or to remind themselves of what it's like to study books. And some (may the Universe bless them!) are taking the course merely for their own intellectual curiosity, because college is about encountering new ideas. (To the English majors: return the favor! Go take some math, history, art, music, engineering, whatever! It's a big world out there; [put on your Sunday clothes.](#))

I'd like you, therefore, to do one final writing exercise about how you might build on this course. Read all of the questions below—not every question will apply to every student, but consider as many as you think will apply to you (feel free to mix and match from different categories). You'll be writing a final D2L posting to share your thoughts.

## English Majors and Minors

Along with WR 301, this course is a prerequisite for 400-level English classes. For this exercise, start by looking at some of the [course descriptions on the ENG Department website](#). (If you plan to stick around the English Dept. for a while, this is a good website to bookmark.) The website is current as of now, but I'm sure it will change at some point—if the link doesn't work, do what you can to find the course descriptions on your own. Think of it as an exercise in research skills.

Read the descriptions, focusing on 400-level ENG and WR courses. (You can look at 300-level and 500-level [graduate] courses too, for context, but focus mainly on the 400-level courses for this exercise.) Think about some of the following questions:

- In your own words, what do you expect to be the main focus of this course? What questions does it ask about English literature, culture, writing, rhetoric, criticism, etc.?
- Some of our advanced classes are very narrowly focused, or tackle very specialized topics rather than general skills and knowledge. How do you think you'd be expected to apply what you've learned in ENG 300 to these specialized topics? How might ENG 300, in combination with any other 200-level or 300-level courses you've taken, serve as a broad base for something more narrowly focused?
- Putting yourself in the professors' shoes, what knowledge and skills do they seem to assume on the part of students? Since ENG 300 is supposed to prepare students for "literary form and analysis" in a variety of contexts, some of them pretty far afield from

what we've discussed, what would you say they expect you to know—or to know how to do—as of day one of the class?

- What courses look most unfamiliar or surprising to you? What courses tackle subjects that would require you to stretch yourself in a new way? Whether you take this class or not, how might you enter that class prepared to build on what you learned this quarter?
- Where would you feel most/least prepared for some of these courses? Where do you think you'd need to “catch up” or ask for additional help, and where do you think you'd be most confident? If you feel you still have “gaps” in knowledge or skills—join the club! We all do! This is a good opportunity for self-reflection. (And please don't avoid classes just because their topics seem unfamiliar. Often those end up being students' favorite classes, and professors know that their students arrive with different backgrounds.)

### Non-Majors Who May or (sob!) May Not Plan to Take More English and Writing

If you're not a major or minor but you're sufficiently intrigued to take more ENG/WR classes, look at the same link ([ENG/WR course descriptions](#)) and think about some of the following. **I'd also encourage you to read the questions in the previous section**, since they may apply to you as well. If you're a non-major who hopes/plans never to hear the word “English” again, I ask that you open your mind (temporarily, at least) for the purposes of this exercise, and think about how you might continue to apply and grow what you've learned this quarter.

- What classes look like they'd be challenging and stimulating for you? What classes might help you to look at literature, writing, etc. from new angles? What classes make you say, “Wait, that's a thing?” What would you expect to study or investigate about that thing?
- In what forms of reading, writing, and scholarly inquiry would this class engage you? What sorts of assignments would you expect? What skills from ENG 300 would you need to brush up on, or continue developing, to succeed in this course, if you took it?
- How might this course complement, supplement, feed into, or diverge from the topics you tend to encounter in your current major/minor? All knowledge is interconnected, though it's not all identical. What are some of the overlaps and non-overlaps between your major and the subjects tackled in our advanced ENG/WR courses?
- What classes look fun? Stimulating? Challenging? Engaging? Useful? Just something new and different?

**D2L Posting:** Synthesize your thoughts about the above, and in a D2L posting of 300-500 words, reflect on how ENG 300 prepares you for your advanced work in college (in whatever context that applies: as a major, minor, or beyond). **Please aim to demonstrate curiosity and open-mindedness as a student, scholar, writer, and thinker;** this is not the place to grouse about how the classes look boring and pointless and you'd never take them and you just want to go back to reading the books you read in middle school, etc. etc. etc. (If you feel that way, you're entitled, but it's not the point of the exercise.) Also, **please do not use the word “grade” (or**



**synonyms).** Think about your own *learning*. The goal is to close your time in ENG 300 by reflecting on the work for which it has intended to prepare you.



Handout developed by Josh Epstein, Portland State University, 16 September 2020, and licensed under the terms of [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) (Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial).