

# How do I engage in **CLOSE READING?**



**START HERE**

**Carefully read/view the passage** at least once to gain a sense of its overall meaning. Pay attention to details. You may want to try paraphrasing the passage.

**Read the passage again, with a pencil in hand (and maybe a highlighter, too).**

Annotate the text (highlight and underline key words and phrases; write questions and thoughts in the margins). Do this again, with greater specificity, after developing an inquiry question.

**Consider diction and word meaning.** Look up the meaning of unfamiliar words/references. What types of words are used? Do any words have interesting connotations? Does the piece use slang, idioms, or other language particular to a specific group or culture?

**Look for patterns.** These could include repetitions, contradictions, similarities, etc.

**Pay attention to syntax.** Are the sentences simple or complex? Does the syntax allow for ambiguity or double meanings? How would you describe the rhythm of the sentences?

**Consider textual context.** In what context(s) does the passage appear? What role does the passage play in the movement/moment of the larger text?

**Examine the structure and organization.** What does the passage look like? How would you describe its form? How does it develop its themes/ideas? How are ideas organized?

**Pay attention to tone and narrative voice.**

What is the speaker's (as distinct from narrator's/author's) attitude toward his/her subject and audience? How does the tone reflect or contribute to this attitude? What does the passage reveal about the speaker? Are there multiple speakers in this passage? What is the relationship between narrator and speaker?

**Look for use of imagery and other figurative language/rhetorical devices.**

How is sensory detail used? What sort of imagery is invoked? How do the images work in the passage and throughout the larger text? Does the passage lack imagery? If so, why? What metaphors, similes, or symbols are used? How do these work with respect to themes of the passage and/or the text as a whole? What other rhetorical devices are present?

**Draw conclusions about possible themes.** Think about how you can relate all these details to possible themes that are both explicitly and implicitly evoked by the passage. Attempt to relate these themes to others appearing outside the immediate passage.

**END HERE**

**Construct a thesis.** Based on all this information and observation, construct a thesis that ties the details together. Determine how the passage illuminates the concerns, themes, and issues of the larger text. Ask yourself how the passage provides insight into the text (and its context). Try to determine how the passage provides us a key to understanding the work as whole.