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**Developing your claims from evidence:
The art of close reading and creating body paragraphs**

What is close reading?

Close reading is the primary method for analyzing other scholars' arguments. It is based on the idea that *how* an idea is presented affects the idea's meaning. Writers who practice close reading often focus on the following elements of another writer's work:

- Choice of terms: Writers are very precise in the words they choose to convey their ideas. One way of analyzing the idea is to pay attention to the specific terms a writer chooses and explain why that choice of term has a significant impact on the writer's argument.
- Reasoning: Writers develop their claims by making logical connections between ideas or between ideas and evidence. Another way of "close reading" a passage is to pay attention to the logic the writer uses. What *warrants* (the principle that justifies relating the claim to the writer's reason—see *The Craft of Research*, Ch. 7, p.114) does the writer use? Do these connections make sense? Why or why not?
- Evidence, examples, and illustrations: Evidence serves to show that claims are not merely "opinions" or speculation. Evidence helps to show *why* the reasoning supporting a claim is valid by referring to concrete facts, events, and situations. In close reading, analyzing evidence consists of examining how well the evidence reflects the reasoning offered by the writer.

Close reading as the fundamental building block for your paragraphs

Because close reading is the most common method of argument analysis, it shapes the form and rhetoric of body paragraphs for academic essays. On the next page is a sentence-by-sentence guide to the format of body paragraphs for the academic essays you will be writing for your humanities classes.

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Creating a strong paragraph

A strong paragraph is based on clearly presenting your point for the paragraph, providing evidence, explaining that evidence, and analyzing how and why that evidence supports your overall position.

A strong paragraph usually consists of several key elements:

- a) A clear introduction of the specific *problem* or issue the paragraph will discuss
- b) An initial statement of your *paragraph claim* and a *reason* for that claim. (Note: In shorter essays, both a) and b) sometimes can be encompassed by a single sentence).
- c) A contextual introduction to the evidence and why it appropriate to the issue.
- d) Presentation of evidence to support your paragraph claim and reason in the form of a quotation or paraphrase from the source essay. Be sure to integrate the evidence into your own sentence; ex. “This contradiction is made apparent in Nussbaum’s claim that “...” (see *A Pocket Style Manual*, “Integrating nonfiction sources”). (Note: Both c) and d) can be encompassed by a single sentence).
- e) An interpretation/explanation of what you think the author is trying to convey in that piece of evidence—a restatement of the writer’s idea from the writer’s point of view (see “the believing game” in *They Say/I Say*)
- f) An analysis of the evidence in which you explain how your interpretation of the evidence supports your *reason* for your *claim*. (This analysis can often require several sentences for full explanation.)
- g) An explanation of why this point is significant to your overall claim about the larger issue raised by the source essay (motive).

Using the above pattern as a guide, draft your own body paragraph by close reading a passage that directly relates to the problem you’ve identified. Begin by freewriting and taking notes, and then draft the paragraph.

Freewriting/Notetaking:

- Begin by identifying a part of the essay that suggests a problem or tension.
- Close read that section by analyzing the choice of terms, reasoning, or evidence.
- Based on that analysis, make a claim.

Drafting:

- Create sentences that correspond to elements (a) through (g) in the structure of a strong paragraph developed above. Keep in mind that that you might need more than one sentence to fully develop each element, and that sometimes two elements can be addressed within a single sentence.