



WRITERS'
CENTRE

LH1 Writing Workshop

Professor Tyagi

Workshop Agenda

- Opening discussion (*≈ 10 mins*)
- Slides on LH1 common writing problems (*≈ 20 mins*)
- LH1 Essay 2 writing exercise (*≈ 15 mins*)
- Optional mini-consultations with WC tutors (*≈ 15 mins*)

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Writers' Centre

Academic Writing Workshops

LH1: Reading and Responding to Texts

The workshop handout can be found [here](#).

The workshop slides can be found [here](#).

Opening Discussion

With the people at your table, discuss:

- What was writing LH1 Essay 1 like?
- What questions or concerns do you have about Essay 2, or LH1 writing in general?

LH1 Essays

- Three LH1 essays this semester:

Essay 1 (due Week 8) = Close Reading a Passage

Essay 2 (due Week 12) = Asking a Question about
a Text

Essay 3 (due Exam Week 1) = Academic / Creative
Comparison of
Two Texts

LH1 Common Problems

- Common problems with these essays:

Essay 1 = Close Reading a Passage

“How do I pick a good passage to close read?”

“How do I close read well?”

LH1 Common Problems

- Common problems with these essays:

Essay 2 = Asking a Question about a Text

“Do I still need to close read?”

“How do I ask a good question?”

LH1 Common Problems

- Common problems with these essays:

Essay 3 = Academic Comparison

“How do I structure my comparison of the two texts?”

“Do I just talk about the similarities and differences between them?”

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I pick a good passage to close read?”

Pick a passage that stands out to you as being beautiful, ugly, strange, annoying, or interesting for some other reason.

Passages that elicit a strong emotional reaction from you, such as passages that sadden or disgust you, are often worth close reading.

Ask yourself, what is making me have this reaction?

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I pick a good passage to close read?”

There should be compelling things happening in the passage at the level of both content and style, that is, not just *what* is happening in the passage, but more particularly *how* language is being used to describe the events within it.

Any casual reader can notice the content, but it's your job to reveal aspects of the passage only apparent after multiple attentive readings.

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I pick a good passage to close read?”

A good passage also connects to the text’s broader themes, or formal or stylistic features, allowing it to help us better understand the work as a whole.

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I close read well?”

Go through the passage word by word, line by line. Students are often scattershot in their reading of a passage, jumping around it haphazardly, skipping over lines, or even ignoring large portions of it.

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I close read well?”

Close reading should be focused and sustained, carefully analyzing each line at a time in order to extract as much evidence as possible.

The “Close Reading Literature” worksheet, available under “Resources” on the Writers’ Centre website, can help with this.

LH1 Common Problems

- “Do I still need to close read in Essay 2?”

Probably.

Professors vary in how obsessive they are about close reading, but most welcome it.

Check with your professor about whether they want you to be very detail-oriented, or if they are fine with you taking a more macro perspective on the text, focusing, for example, on broad themes rather than specific metaphors or diction.

LH1 Common Problems

- “Do I still need to close read in Essay 2?”

Even though Essay 2’s focus moves beyond Essay 1’s one short passage, asking you to frame a question that cuts across the whole text, close reading is still useful.

This is because close reading one or more passages for Essay 2 allows you to gather relevant literary evidence that helps you answer the question you are posing.

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I ask a good question in Essay 2?”

Try brainstorming a list of many questions about your chosen passage(s) as you can think of.

Some of these questions will likely be basic, easily answerable in one sentence.

However, you might be able to bundle a few basic questions together into one super-question that is appropriately sophisticated.

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I ask a good question in Essay 2?”

Two additional approaches might be useful as well: top-down or bottom-up.

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I ask a good question in Essay 2?”

Top-down is when you brainstorm some keywords relevant to the whole text, pick one, turn it into a question, and then find one or more passages relevant to it.

So, keyword → passages.

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I ask a good question in Essay 2?”

Bottom-up is when you start by searching for one or more good passages in the text, pick a keyword that knits them together, and then turn that keyword into a question.

So, passages → keyword.

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I ask a good question in Essay 2?”

Top-down:

Brainstorm some keywords (“majesty” / “fate” / “nature”)

Pick one keyword (“majesty”)

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I ask a good question in Essay 2?”

Top-down:

Turn keyword into a question using who / why / what / when / where / how (e.g. “how is the Raja’s majesty conveyed in the *Sejarah Melayu*?”)

Find passages that will help answer this question (e.g. ones where Raja seems especially majestic)

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I ask a good question in Essay 2?”

Bottom-up:

Pick one or more passages that seem to echo each other.

Pick a keyword that captures what they have in common.

Turn the keyword into a question using who / why / what / where / when / how.

LH1: Essay 2

- Useful *Sundiata* keywords:

Empire-building

Fate

Hospitality

Power

Time

LH1: Essay 2

- Useful Sima Qian keywords:

Advice

Dynastic cycles

Military strategy

Shame

Writing

LH1: Essay 2

- Useful *Sejarah Melayu* keywords:

Foreign relations

Letters

Palimpsest

Political legitimacy

Ruler/ruled

LH1 Common Problems

- “How do I structure my comparison of Text A and Text B in Essay 3?”

Three main options:

1) Introduction A A A B B B Conclusion

2) Introduction A B A B A B Conclusion

3) Introduction AB AB AB AB AB AB Conclusion

Hybrids possible as well e.g. A B A B AB AB AB

LH1 Common Problems

- “Do I just talk about similarities and differences between Texts A and B in Essay 3?”

Yes, but there are bad and good ways to do this.

Bad: *1001 Nights* and the *Epic of Sundiata* are similar and different because they both focus on the supernatural, they both focus on guilt, but only one of them focuses on hospitality.

Analysis is unfocused, scattered across too many unrelated keywords (supernatural/guilt/hospitality).

LH1 Common Problems

- “Do I just talk about similarities and differences between Texts A and B in Essay 3?”

Yes, but there are bad and good ways to do this.

Good: Both *1001 Nights* and the *Epic of Sundiata* descend from an oral storytelling tradition. Here’s how traces of their oral storytelling origins are found in both texts.

Analysis is focused on one keyword (oral storytelling), and moves beyond content to consider form or style.

LH1 Essay 2 Writing Exercise

Firstly, we will close read the sample passage from *Sejarah Melayu's* Chapter 2:

- Jot down a few notes for each of the 16 categories on the “Close Reading Literature” worksheet (*≈8 mins*).

LH1 Essay 2 Writing Exercise

Now that your close reading has familiarized you with the sample *Sejarah Melayu* passage:

- Follow the keywords, questions, thesis, and body paragraphs prompts under “Sample Passage, Continued” (*≈ 8 mins*).

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Resources

On this page, you will find a range of writing aids. You can narrow your search using the drop-down menu below.

Some of the materials have been created by Yale-NUS faculty and peer tutors. Others are materials from writing programmes at other colleges that we have found especially helpful. You will find many of these handouts in hard copy in the Writers' Centre. You can also ask peer tutors for recommendations when you come for a tutoring session.

The Writers' Centre also has a library of books available for borrowing. They can be checked out from the Programme Manager. There are multiple copies of academic writing guides like *They Say, I Say* and *The Craft of Research*, creative writing handbooks, and books by authors who have visited Yale-NUS.

A note on the Yale-NUS materials: The Faculty-generated materials are the result of many years' experience of teaching and assessing written assignments. When a Faculty member finds that he/ she is writing similar comments on different student papers, he/ she often decides to create a handout on it to broadcast the message more widely.

LH1 **Essay** 1: Sample 1

LH1 **Essay** 1: Sample 2

LH1 **Essay** 1: Sample 3

LH1 **Essay** 2: Sample 1

LH1 **Essay** 2: Sample 2

LH1 **Essay** 2: Sample 3

LH1 **Essay** 3: Sample 1

LH1 **Essay** 3: Sample 2

LH1 **Essay** 3: Sample 3

[Student name]

Professor [Name]

Literature and Humanities 1

[Date]

Nature and the Raja's Majesty

We are familiar with the depiction of the Raja in the Sejarah Melayu as a majestic and respectable ruler, but how exactly is his majesty conveyed to the reader? In this essay, I analyse paragraphs from pages 17-20 to suggest that portraying the Raja as being dominant over nature is essential to creating the majesty and kingliness of the Raja¹. I will illustrate how this is done in three ways: firstly, in creating a sense of overwhelming immensity of the Raja's forces; secondly, in the Raja's god-like ability to alter and mould natural landscapes; and lastly, in his ability to command the unwavering loyalty of both man and nature². The Raja's dominance over nature is particularly striking given its contrast to the prevalent association of nature with aspects of divinity, where natural phenomena is typically interpreted as messages or revered as blessings from gods. The Raja's reign over nature and its creatures thus strongly suggests a certain divine majesty that is to be found within the Raja.

LH1 Sample Sejarah Melayu **Close Reading** (Ila Tyagi – Faculty)

50 Questions to Ask your Character (Morgane (Dasha) Ropion – Peer Tutor)

A Brief Guide to the Elements of the Academic Essay (Gordon Harvey, Harvard University)

Argument Revision: Creating a Reverse Outline (Karin Gosselink – Faculty)

Body Paragraph Analysis (Yale University)

Building Paragraphs from **Close Reading** (Karin Gosselink – Faculty)

Brainstorming for Character Creation (Morgane (Dasha) Ropion – Peer Tutor)

Character Development (Morgane (Dasha) Ropion – Peer Tutor)

Close Reading Literature (LH2 Team – Faculty)

Close Reading Visual Art (LH2 Team – Faculty)

The Art of **Close Reading** (Lawrence Ypil – Faculty)