

Topic

“Getting to **Green**”
Developing **Analysis** with Generative AI

Lesson Plan



Objectives

Students in **analytical writing courses** can struggle to fully grasp the difference between observing/describing features of a text and making **interpretive claims rooted in analysis** of those features. This multi-part activity uses color coding and generative AI to establish a clearer framework for students to understand the relationship, *as well as* the critical *differences*, between observation or description and **analysis**.

Materials

a class text for analysis
access to generative AI
(ChatGPT, Bing Chat, etc.)
collaborative document
(e.g., Google Doc, etc.)

Outcomes

Through the activity, students will

- **formulate working definitions** that effectively characterize and distinguish “observation,” “description,” “summary,” “analysis,” and “claim”
- **identify** instructive examples of “observation,” “description,” “summary,” “analysis,” and “claim”
- **practice “close reading” or analysis** on an assigned text to reveal relationships in its language and details that drive its work, meaning, and implications
- **make interpretive, analytical claims** about a text and **explicate relevant evidence** in support of those claims
- **identify opportunities for revision** in a draft
- **propose** revision strategies
- **experiment with generative AI’s** affordances and limitations to assist them in their processes for analysis, iterative writing, and learning

Steps

This scaffolded activity includes the following:

1. **Individual:** Students read a brief explanation of “close reading,” watch a brief YouTube video from DreamWorks’ *Shrek*, and respond to questions prompting them to extrapolate and apply definitions.
2. **Small Group:** Students are given a handout and assigned one category to define & apply.
3. **Collective:** The class works together to create census for working definitions and examples.
4. **Collective:** The instructor uses generative AI to create a working draft of a brief essay, and the class works together to iteratively prompt the generative AI for better responses and then begin color coding its product to distinguish between activity that falls in the left side vs. right side of the handout grid.
5. **Small Group:** Students work together to annotate the AI draft to identify areas for revision and propose revision strategies that will further develop the essay’s analysis



NOTE: I’ve chosen two colors (pink & green) within the context of my course’s reference points, including *Shrek*. But the colors can be changed to suit instructor preference.

1

Assign the text included here, “Close Reading’ Texts: Overview + Resources” or similar reading(s) that clearly explain what we mean by critically reading a text and engaging in analysis of its details and features. Facilitate active learning by posting a few questions for students to answer (see sample questions below). **The goal is to prompt students to identify and extrapolate significant ideas and apply them to a current text.**

2

Before class, use the included handout to (a) make print copies, and (b) post the fillable PDF version to your LMS. **The goal is to give students a handout they can complete over the course of the class in their preferred modality** (some will want to write by hand, others will appreciate using devices). At the beginning of class, provide the handouts and split students into 5 groups correlating with categories on the handout. Give groups 5-8 minutes to generate an explanation for their ONE assigned category which characterizes it in a way that distinguishes it from the others. While groups work, draw the categories on the board or project a document on the screen within which you can type student contributions.

3

Reconvene. For each category, ask the assigned group to share their definition. Invite the class to contribute to this definition until it is clear and robust enough to explain/distinguish it. As groups and individuals contribute, capture key language on the board or screen. Depending on what students say, you may need to prompt them with follow-up/clarifying questions. Finally, for each, ask the class to offer an example from the text that models making this particular move. It works best if you use the same example across all 5 categories, so students see what distinguishes each. **The goal is to generate consensus around working definitions and distinguish between the kind of work that falls under the left side (pink) vs right side (green),** which students can track on their own handout (see the example student-completed handout included below). Use this opportunity to reiterate “getting to green” in their own writing, and the way pink drives the move toward green.

4

Before class, input a prompt for an essay into generative AI and paste its output into a collaborative document. After Step 3, project both the generative AI tool and the doc on the overhead screen. Quickly review with students what the AI generated in response to the prompt. Ask them to identify aspects of this “writing” that fall into either the pink or the green side of the handout. [Note: Without sophisticated prompting, the AI will default heavily to summary and description (pink) with generalized gestures toward analysis (green) but no real “close reading.” While it might “sound” sophisticated, it will produce similar moves that first-year writers make and, thus, offers a judgement-free zone to critique these generalizing moves and identify their ineffectiveness.] Depending on time, ask students to come up with one or two new ways to prompt the AI to revise portions of this essay to develop the green. For instance, identify a generalized claim and ask the AI to refine it, etc.

5

Depending on time, in this class, for homework, or a subsequent class, divide the most recent AI revised text into sections and assign one to each of the groups. Ask them to work within the community document to highlight aspects of their section in pink or green and use the doc’s comment feature to insert suggestions/strategies that they could pursue if they wanted to use this text as a foundation for their own essay. **The goal for #4 and #5 is to (a) continue formulating the relationship and differences between observations/descriptions/summaries and analysis/claims; (b) help students identify the affordances and limitations of the AI to help them iterate, analyze, produce, and revise writing; and (c) model strong iterative writing practices, such as identifying areas/opportunities for revision and articulating strategies and next steps to pursue revision.**

“Close Reading” Texts: An Overview + Resources

Texts Are Like Ogres

First, watch this short clip from DreamWorks’ movie *Shrek* – “Ogres are like Onions.”

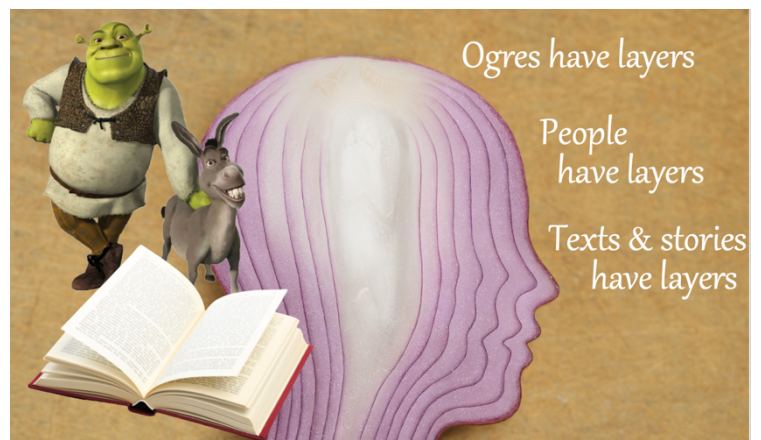


<https://youtu.be/-FtCTW2rVFM?si=wncaNkaOF965MPMu>

Deeper and Multiple Meanings vs. the “Hidden Meaning”

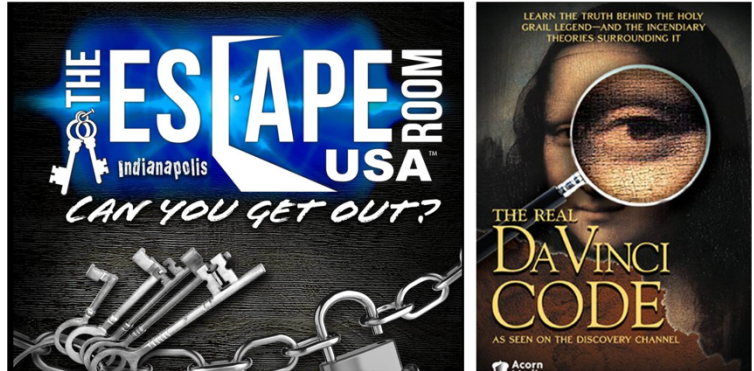
Anything that is rich and complex has layers. Think about people. When we first meet others, we don't share with them **all** of our most intimate selves right away do we? We share our outermost layer, a kind of superficial self (this doesn't mean a fake self, just our outermost surface self that's fairly evident to others and that we share easily).

As people spend more time with us and get to know us on a deeper level, they realize that this surface layer, while true, genuine, and important, is just one layer (the most obvious layer) of who we are. The things that deeply drive us, motivate us, explain how we tick and how we came to be this way, tend to exist below the surface layer. Our family, friends, and people with whom we have intimate relationships are the ones who peel back those layers and see more of how we operate. Rich texts, whether literary or otherwise, work precisely the same way. **Like ogres, onions, and people, texts have layers.**



They have an outermost layer – the obvious stuff that every reader can see without spending too much time or looking too closely. But if we do look more closely, by re-reading and analyzing the details, then we begin to see complex layers of additional meaning emerge.

But this is not the same thing as hunting for “hidden meanings,” which students can sometimes feel like their professors are asking them to do. We are not detectives in *The DaVinci Code* or *National Treasure*. There aren't hidden clues that will lead us to the one correct, hidden answer that will reveal the secrets of the universe! In other words, there isn't ONE correct, hidden meaning in a story, and your job isn't to crack the secret code of a text's symbolism to figure it out. A literary text is not an escape room! Just like you cannot be understood as “just one thing” (you don't have just one thing you care about or just one thing that motivates the way you think or act or behave), texts hardly ever have just one meaning that suddenly explains everything. Instead, they have a lot of different, interconnected, and even sometimes contradictory or fraught ideas and interests that can speak more and less powerfully to different people in different ways at different times in different contexts.



For instance, let's take the movie *Shrek*. Just like ogres, that movie itself has many layers. It can be read on a superficial level as an entertaining, sarcastic comedy about an ogre that befriends a donkey and marries a princess [this is the outermost layer that's obvious to everyone without much investigation]. But it can also be more closely read:

- as a meta-commentary inventorying a history of fairytales and fairytale tropes, which reveals their ongoing influence in cultural storytelling.
- as a critique of Western beauty standards and of the way children's stories perpetuate dangerous stereotypes and formulas for normativity (i.e., all that stuff about Fiona hiding her “true” self, etc.).
- as a critique of gendered norms and assumptions that rethinks women's agency in the genre of fairytales and children's stories (i.e., all that stuff about Fiona being a very different Princess than Cinderella and Snow White).
- as a critique of capitalism and the consumerism that has turned childhood into a capitalist enterprise of goods and services (i.e., all those references to Disney World and consumer culture).



DreamWorks *Shrek* (2001)

Close Reading = Reading Critically = Analysis

So, what do we mean by “close reading” a text?

Closely reading a text means investigating a text’s nuances and delving its meanings based on its words, structure, and patterns and how those features reveal or communicate larger themes, ideas, and implications. It's crucial to differentiate between conducting this kind of detailed analysis – often called “doing a close reading” – and writing one. “Doing a close reading” or “engaging in close reading” is a process of reading and thinking, of analysis and investigation, that moves from potentially small, concrete details to larger implications. While “writing a close reading” means coherently articulating those larger implications for your reader, and then helping them see the validity of it for themselves by marshalling the relevant details, explanations, and explications as evidence.

Again, this does not mean searching for the “hidden” meaning, inventing meanings that aren't there, or that “anything goes.” While, yes, texts can be rich and can speak to many issues and ideas, that does not mean “it's all subjective” and anyone can argue anything without basis. For instance, while you could advance dozens of reasonable claims about what you think the movie *Shrek* is doing (what issues it's taking up, what it's revealing or critiquing or saying), you could not argue “Shrek reveals the tradeoffs a society makes in personal freedoms for safety through government surveillance” or that “Shrek is a text preoccupied with questions of agency in response to human reliance on technology.” There is no evidence that this movie takes up either of those issues in any sustained way. **Close reading means paying attention to what is there** – to the layers, details, themes, and relationships that exist within the text and that, with a bit of careful investigation through analysis, become more apparent.



Disney *National Treasure* (2004)

As mentioned above, “doing” a close reading means zooming in and digging into to specific moments or details in the text to see what larger implications they reveal. Writing a close reading, on the other hand, requires flipping that equation. You start by clearly telling your reader the larger implication that you've identified through your analysis, and then you take them into the most relevant and revealing moments and details that illustrate the power and validity of your interpretation (i.e., show your work).

Most importantly, close reading means breaking down the text into smaller, specific pieces and details, and then being able to make larger claims about the text that are rooted in those specific details. When we close read a text, **we are not trying to summarize plot or make broad, vague gestures. Rather, we're interested in zooming in on specific patterns, key details, and particularly relevant scenes, passages, and language.** You've heard the expression “the devil is in the details”? Well, the analysis is also in the details! You can say a lot about a text by focusing on something small and specific that seems especially suggestive or meaningful.

From Observation to Analysis

There is nothing wrong with making thoughtful **observations** about a text, **describing** meaningful features and elements, and **summarizing** key patterns and choices. Indeed, you cannot get to analysis without first doing precisely these things! It's important not to rush to judgement, not to jump to quick conclusions. That is the road to vague, generalized, and facile ideas that lack nuance and sophistication. Instead, really “sitting with” the details is important. Pushing yourself to observe patiently and carefully what the text is giving you, the choices that it's making, and the details it's delivering can be very rewarding.

Eventually, however, you must move through these stages of careful observation into analysis that drives interpretive claims. For instance, spending time observing and questioning all the references to fairytales and fairytale tropes that *Shrek* includes and the playful tone with which it treats them can eventually equip you to make claims about how the movie is *doing* something more than merely entertaining us with an ogre, donkey, and princess.



But it's not enough to say “Shrek includes a variety of references to fairytales. First, there's this reference and then this reference; and then Shrek battles a dragon to save Princess Fiona, and there we see this fairytale trope and this other fairytale trope.” If you stay here, you haven't yet made it to analysis. Rather, you're still in the realm of observations and descriptions. Important for your thinking, yes, but not yet an interpretive claim that need analysis to convincingly demonstrate it.

If, however, you insist that “Shrek's many references to popular fairytales and its self-aware deployment of recognizable tropes, such as knights and princesses, highlight the fairytale genre's implicit gendered norms, through which the movie attempts to rethink and revise women's agency in a genre of storytelling that remains relevant” well then! – now you're in the world of analysis. You're making a sophisticated **interpretive claim** that requires **analysis of textual details** to effectively demonstrate your case.

Resources for “Doing” and Writing a Close Reading

Harvard University – “Aphorisms on the Close Reading Process”

<https://wilson.fas.harvard.edu/aphorisms/close-reading-process>

Oregon State – “What is Close Reading? Definition and Strategies”

<https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-close-reading-definition-and-strategies>

“Close Reading for English Literature Assignments”

<Chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.haverford.edu/sites/default/files/Office/Writing-Center/How-to-Write-a-Close-Reading.pdf>

Purdue OWL – “Close Reading a Text and Avoiding Pitfalls”

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/writing_about_fiction/index.html

Active Reading Questions



Objective

To facilitate active learning as students individually engage with the assigned reading before class by guiding them to identify, paraphrase, and then apply key ideas and definitions.

1. After reading “Close Reading Texts: Overview + Resources,” briefly explain the difference between reading at the “surface level” of a text and “close reading” a text. What are the different things to which you might pay attention if you’re engaging in one way versus the other? In other words, what are we doing when we are “close reading” or “reading analytically”?
2. Apply these distinctions to *[insert title of a current text the class is reading]* to illustrate the difference. What are some important but fairly straightforward things that are apparent to you and to most first-time readers of this text? What are you beginning to notice emerge as you have been close reading/analyzing the text?

OBSERVATION

DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

ANALYSIS

CLAIM



OBSERVATION

DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

ANALYSIS

CLAIM



These provide the material that fuels analysis/claims.

Thesis = your BIG claim, larger argument

OBSERVATION

Looking to gain info.
What's observable to others.
Using the 5 senses.
Viewing what's in front of you and noticing things.

Example:

The narrator of The Hobbit calls attention to Smaug (the dragon) having gems encrusted into his belly from sleeping on his hoard of treasure

DESCRIPTION

Verbalizing and organizing observations.
Describing what is happening based on what you observe - But not yet or necessarily going to the big picture of summary

Paints a picture.
Mostly observable facts, might move toward summary.
Bilbo & the reader learn that Smaug has slept on his treasure so long that it has become part of him.

SUMMARY

An overview of new information.
Bringing facts into a picture.
Grouping of ideas.
Scheme for organizing.
Brief restatement of the whole

Not as detail-oriented as descrip.
Chp 6 introduces readers to the dragon and his lair, in which he sleeps on his treasure.

ANALYSIS

Critical thinking about the the things you observe.
UNPACK what you've observed to identify salient details and implications.
Process of Inquiry!
Asking questions!
Why? How? So what?
An in-depth understanding grounded in support.
Open to reasonable interpretation.

Smaug clearly doesn't value comfort or "use" his treasure to improve his life or anyone else's. He's greedy? A hoarder?

CLAIM

Arguments based on your analysis.
Must be supported with evidence.
**YOUR IDEAS!
YOUR VOICE!**
Your arguable interpretation.

Analysis leads you to claims. But essays need to foreground claims FIRST then provide the analysis as evidence for readers.

Smaug is a figure of the story warning against the loneliness and pain of greed.

Represents a spectrum - Categories can shade into the others.