

## Assignment: Close-Reading Paper

### What?

For this assignment, you will pick a passage from one of the novels we have read so far (either *Roxana* or *Foe*). Your passage can be very short (e.g., a paragraph) or longer (e.g., a scene that takes several pages). You will then prepare a short essay of 3-5 pages in which you offer a “close reading” of this passage.

### Process

Skim through one or both of our course novels; allow yourself to be guided by what interests you. Once you’ve selected a potential passage, try describing it. First, what does it literally say? On a surface level, what is actually happening?—that is, what is the passage’s function within the plot, or towards characterization? Then, what is strange, notable, or interesting about its formal features (narrative point of view, particular word choices, syntactical structures, imagery, figures, etc.)? Finally, what else, if anything, do you notice about this passage?

Your next task is to think about how this thick description of your passage contributes to, complicates, or alters your sense of the literal surface meaning of the text. What does your passage formally tell us that was not conveyed in your literal summary? Do the weird/subtle things you’ve noticed undermine or alter that content?

Once you’ve answered these questions, it’s time to venture a claim!

Your close reading should allow you to demonstrate that you have a nuanced understanding of both the passage you’ve chosen and the text at large, but your paper should also advance a compelling argument. To that end, you’ll need to make a claim (something others might disagree with) and support this claim with evidence (i.e., with plenty of directly quoted material from the text). Finally, your paper must contain analysis; you’ll need to explain how your carefully chosen evidence supports the claim you’ve made.

### The Details

Please make sure to title your essay, include a “works cited” page using MLA style, and use parenthetical citation throughout for direct quotations. There is no need for you to consult external sources for this assignment, but if you do, make sure to cite them appropriately.