

## Excerpts of ENGL 301 Syllabus

### Analyzing Historical Texts

To analyze means to break something down into its component parts. University-level reading should be analytical reading, and the following questions will help you identify the most important parts, or aspects, of the texts we are reading this semester. You can prepare for class discussions and improve your analytical reading skills by reading the assigned texts with these questions in mind and trying to answer them. (The questions are adapted from the Elements of Reasoning in Richard Paul and Linda Elder's *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking*, 2006).

#### Text in Red

Indicates the infusion of the  
**Elements of Reasoning**

#### Text in Blue

Indicates the infusion of the  
**Intellectual Standards**

#### Text in Green

Indicates the infusion of the  
**Intellectual Traits**

#### [Bracketed Text]

Indicates the indirect use of  
critical thinking **[Elements]**,  
**[Standards]**, or **[Traits]**

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Framework of Critical Thinking](#)

**Questions:** What questions is the writer weighing in on? Of the cultural issues of the time, which appear in this text? (For example, the heroic ideal looms large in Beowulf.)

**Information or Evidence:** Where in the text are these cultural issues addressed? Which lines or paragraphs on which page?

**Inferences/Conclusions:** Overall, how would you summarize the take on these issues in this text? (For example, is Beowulf positive or negative about the heroic ideal, or a bit of both?)

**Concepts:** What cultural ideals or beliefs stand behind the behavioral norms in this text? (For example, what besides the heroic ideal in Beowulf creates the ethical standards?)

**Assumptions:** What does the writer of the text appear to take for granted about the enduring human questions (e.g., the nature of the world, the purpose of human life, the way society is organized, what constitutes justice)? What does the writer assume that we would not assume in the twenty-first century?

**Consequences:** What are the consequences of acting in accordance with the ideals expressed in the text? What conflicts are created with other ideals of the culture or even with other ideals in the same text? If the text “solves” one problem, does it create another?

**Point of View:** How is this text a product of its historical moment? How does this text shape its historical moment? For what part of its society does the text speak? (For example, do the ideals it represents apply to all members of the society or are they different for different classes or for men and women?)

**Techniques:** What writerly techniques make the text effective? For example, how are the characters made interesting to us? What kind of imagery is used? Is there a metrical or stanzaic pattern?

## Evaluating Arguments

To evaluate the arguments we read and those you will be making, we will adapt the “Standards of Reasoning” from *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools*, by Richard Paul and Linda Elder (Berkeley: The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2006):

**CLARITY:** Could you give an illustration? Could you give an example? Are there enough transitions indicate how the parts of your paper follow one from another? Have you communicated why your claim is important?

**ACCURACY:** Does your thesis hold if you consider the whole range of texts? Does it hold if you consider the internal contradictions within texts? Have you written a refutation to deal with any counter-evidence your audience might cite?

**PRECISION:** Does your thesis require qualification in order to be completely accurate? (For example, does what you say about the sonneteers hold for all the sonneteers or only for some of them? Is what you are saying true of all social groups or just some?)

**RELEVANCE:** Does your thesis bear on the central issue of the course (i.e., the nature of the transition from Medieval to Early Modern)? If you are giving reasons, are you including the most important reasons, the most powerful explanations?

**DEPTH:** Is your thesis complex enough to deal with the internal complexity of the texts? Is it dealing with the most significant factors in the cultural change?

**BREADTH:** Is your thesis complex enough to deal with the range of evidence?

**LOGIC:** Look at the transitions between paragraphs: do these “signpost” the way your argument is put together? If you are comparing, have you used the same criteria on both sides of the comparison? If you are classifying, are the categories distinct and not overlapping?

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