

Introduction: Close Reading – Why and How?

**Norman Sieroka
(Philosophy, University of Bremen)
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Close reading – meaning and relevance

- Close reading as a means to improve your academic literacy
 - Academic literacy:
 - location and comprehension of relevant information
 - adoption of an up to date view
 - development of informed conceptions, opinions, beliefs
 - ability to communicate these ideas and to persuade others of their importance
 - Close reading:
 - mindful and disciplined reading of a text ... in view of a deeper understanding of its meaning
 - determining most important argumentative claims and how they fit together to support the author's opinion
- Preparation also for your readings (paper analysis)



Close reading – what to do and to look for?

- Ideally, academic texts are carefully crafted
- ... and reading them well requires a similar degree of care

- Consider the context
 - Keep in mind that writing arises from a concrete setting
 - ... who wrote it, when and where was it published, for what audience and purposes?
(maybe there are conflicts of interests involved)
 - Consider the ways in which authors incorporate, reject, or respond their colleagues' work

- Take your time
 - Careful reading cannot be rushed
 - However, individual reading styles differ
 - reading the same text several times with progressively more detailed attention
 - work through the text patiently and diligently a single time

Close reading – what to do and to look for?

- Spot crucial passages
 - Texts vary in density from sentence to sentence
 - Learning to highlight the most important portions
- Identify central theses
 - Sometimes they are presented subtly in the context of some general framework or methods
- Locate supportive arguments
 - Academic authors do not merely state opinions but also undertake to support their truth
 - (Within a written text) an important part of this support is based on logical argumentation
 - That is,
 - ... the writer will (explicitly or implicitly) offer premises that are supposedly true
 - ... and then claim that his/her inference from these premises leads inexorably to the given conclusion
 - NB: Although a disciplined study of the forms of logical reasoning is helpful, you'll probably learn to recognize the most common patterns more or less intuitively.

Close reading – what to do and to look for?

- Assess the arguments
 - One is obliged to accept the conclusion only if it is supported by correct (valid) inference from true premises!
 - Thus, there are two ways in which to question the legitimacy of a particular argument:
 - (i) Ask whether the premises are true
(one or more of the premises may be unstated assumptions)
 - (ii) Ask whether the inference from premises to conclusion is valid
(it may help to apply the same pattern of reasoning to a more familiar case)
 - Or (if all else fails) consider possible counter-examples

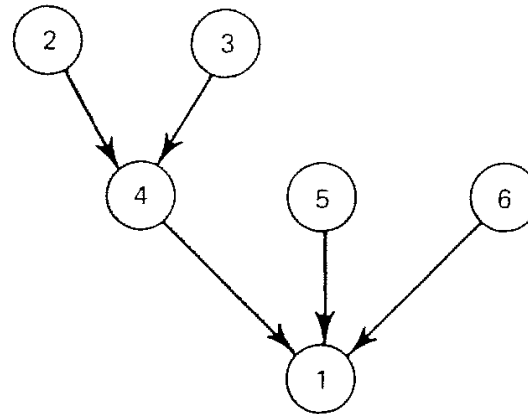
- Look for connections
 - Articles occur within an academic (disciplinary) tradition

Close reading – two everyday examples

- Let's have a look at two (newspaper and popular science) examples
- ... in order to see some “ways of arguing”
 - NB: the examples are taken from I.M. Copi: *Introduction to Logic*. Macmillan, New York 1986, pp.43-44.
 - Looking ahead, the Labor Department sees manufacturing's share of nonfarm jobs, which stood at close to 24 percent in 1969, dropping to about 19 percent by 1990. The reasons for the fall are threefold: Because of high interest rates and low birth rates, the American appetite for autos, refrigerators and other big-ticket items is waning. More of what is bought here is being produced abroad. And American industry is becoming increasingly automated. (from *U.S. News*)
 - When the state levies a sales tax, the cost of the taxed commodity rises. Because the cost of the commodity is higher, less of it is sold—gasoline or liquor or cigarette sales, for example, always suffer when taxes are placed on them. It follows that the sales tax must affect individuals other than just the buyers. The seller of the commodity must bear some of the tax because his sales have declined and presumably so has his income. The workers or other suppliers of services who produce the commodity will also be penalized, because less of the taxed commodity will be bought and therefore fewer people will be employed making it. In other words, the incidence, or burden, of a tax is often much more complex than appears on the surface. (taken from *Five Economic Challenges*)

Close reading – two everyday examples

- First example
(from Copi 1986)



① [Looking ahead, the Labor Department sees manufacturing's share of non-farm jobs, which stood at close to 24 percent in 1969, dropping to about 19 percent by 1990.]

The reasons for the fall are threefold: Because of ② [high interest rates] and ③ [low birth rates,] ④ [the American appetite for autos, refrigerators and other big-ticket items is waning.] ⑤ [More of what is bought here is being produced abroad.] And ⑥ [American industry is becoming increasingly automated.]⁴⁷

Close reading – two everyday examples

- Second example

(from Copi 1986)

When ① [the state levies a sales tax,] ② [the cost of the taxed commodity rises.]
Because ② [the cost of the commodity is higher,] ③ [less of it is sold—gasoline or liquor or cigarette sales, for example, always suffer when taxes are placed on them.] It follows that ④ [the sales tax must affect individuals other than just the buyers.] ⑤ [The seller of the commodity must bear some of the tax] because ③ [his sales have declined] and presumably ⑥ [so has his income.] ⑦ [The workers or other suppliers of services who produce the commodity will also be penalized,] because ③ [less of the taxed commodity will be bought] and therefore ⑧ [fewer people will be employed making it.] In other words, ⑨ [the incidence, or burden, of a tax is often much more complex than appears on the surface.]⁴⁸

