

# A Close Look at Close Reading

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## Today's Objectives

At the end of today's workshop, I will be able to:

- describe how to do close reading
- access applicable close reading resources

## Close Reading

Close reading means “reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension” ([Boyles, 2012](#)). For our students, this looks like being curious and re-reading a text several times to uncover its meaning. Asking text dependent questions (questions that can only be answered by using evidence from the text) provides structure and scaffolding for close reading. The basic strategy is to have a go-to set of text dependent questions we can use with different reading passages.

## Steps in Close Reading



**Choose short reading passages** – Use short but interesting reading passages. Begin with juicy sentences and work up to multiple paragraphs of GED®-level material.

**Create and answer text dependent questions** – Create questions that students can answer based only on direct evidence from the text. Find close reading sample questions [here](#) or Google: Atlas close reading questions (ATLAS, 2019).

**Do multiple reads** – As students read, they should think about:

1. What does the text say?
  - Who, what, when, where, why, how questions
  - Summarize the text in a brief sentence
2. How does the text say it?
  - How can you tell the word \_\_\_\_\_ is important to this text?
  - How is the text organized? (problem/solution, compare/contrast, chronological)
3. What does the text mean?
  - What was the author's purpose in \_\_\_\_\_ ?

**Mark up the text while reading** by using these symbols:

	Underline major points
	Circle key words or phrases that are confusing
? Why does the author mean by . . .	Use a question mark and write out questions you have as you read
! I was surprised the author said . . .	Use an exclamation mark and explain things that caught your attention
→ This reminds me of	Make connections inside the text or to something else you have experienced outside the text. Note the connection.
EX	Mark EX when the author gives an example
①	Number arguments, important ideas, key details, and write words or phrases to restate them

**Encourage Productive Struggle** – Allow students to be challenged by the reading and encourage instructors to be the “guide on the side” instead of the “sage on the stage.”

[Frey and Fisher, 2013](#)



### Using Generative AI for Text Dependent Questions

Need more help creating text dependent questions? [ChatGPT](#) can help! Use a prompt like this one:

You are an adult education teacher. Create a set of ten text dependent questions and suggested answers for the reading passage below. Text dependent questions require students to provide evidence directly from the text in their answers to questions. An example question is, please summarize this reading in 10 words. **[Insert reading passage here]**

## Close Reading with a Rhyme

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;  
All the king's horses and all the king's men  
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

(Public Domain)

1. Who is Humpty Dumpty?
2. Where do these events take place?
3. When did these events take place?
4. How serious was Humpty Dumpty's fall?
5. How important of a person was Humpty Dumpty?
6. What was the outcome of Humpty Dumpty's fall?

## Close Reading with a Juicy Sentence

To Pete, crossing a burning tight-rope across the Grand Canyon—while dressed as a giant squirrel—seemed like a catchy publicity stunt to sell his recent book, *The Epic Adventures of an Amazing Suburban Squirrel*, until, that is, he gained the interest of a desperately hungry turkey vulture.

Use direct evidence from the story to answer these questions:

1. Who are the characters in this story?
2. Where does the story take place?
3. Why is Pete dressed like a squirrel?
4. How do the words **desperately hungry** shape the rest of the story?
5. Would the following sentence be located before or after the story? “It was then, with his stomach growling and the cupboard shelves empty of even the tiniest morsel, that Pete’s eyes chanced upon a picture of the Grand Canyon—taped to the refrigerator—and his thoughts were filled with wide-eyed possibility.” **Please explain your reasoning.**
6. Summarize the story in 10 words or less
7. What is Pete’s personality like?
8. How does Pete’s opinion about his actions change during the story?

Adapted from [Kuehnel, 2019](#)

**“The Courage to Take Action: A Lesson from Rosa Parks” Juicy Sentence with Scaffolding**

Sentence Chunk	Questions	Answers
They began a boycott—teachers and laborers, clergy and domestics,	1. Who does “they” refer to? 2. If “domestic” refers to the running of a home, who might the “domestics” be in this part of the sentence?	
through rain and cold and sweltering heat, day after day, week after week, month after month,	3. What is Obama trying to say about the people who participated in the boycott? 4. Why might Obama have chosen to call the heat “sweltering”?	
walking miles if they had to, arranging carpools where they could, not thinking about the blisters on their feet, the weariness after a full day of work -	5. What sacrifices did the people who boycotted make, according to this part of the sentence?	
walking for respect, walking for freedom, driven by a solemn determination to affirm their God-given dignity.	6. What sacrifices did the people who boycotted make, according to this part of the sentence? 7. What does the word “driven” mean as used here? 8. What God-given dignity were they determined to affirm or declare during this boycott?	Kristine Kelly

## Close Reading with a 100 Word Story

### The Leave Taking

“We heard it before we saw it, coming closer with the squeaky brakes. My son was excited and happy with his new backpack, sneakers, and camouflage sweatshirt. As he headed off for his first day of school, I waved goodbye and tried to control my tears.

“Standing in the terminal, I remembered that day so vividly. I hugged him tightly, not wanting to ever let him go. Then he walked away, very determined and proud in his camouflage. Once again, I tried to stop the tears streaming down my face.”

[\(Reader's Digest®\)](#)

Use direct evidence from the story to answer these questions:

1. Who are the characters in the story?
2. What is the timeline of the story?
3. In the second paragraph, what is the terminal?
4. In the second paragraph, why does one of the characters cry?
5. Why is camouflage important to this story?
6. In the first sentence, what does “coming closer with the squeaky brakes” mean?

## Close Reading with a GED® Passage

### The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill

Shortly after midnight on March 24, 1989, the *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker ran aground on a reef in Prince William Sound off the coast of Alaska. The automatic pilot technology on the vessel was turned off shortly before the accident. The resulting spill of 10.8 million gallons of crude oil is one of the major environmental disasters of the twentieth century.

The captain of the *Exxon Valdez*, Joseph Hazelwood, had failed to personally direct the ship back into the proper shipping lanes after he ordered the tanker to move out of the way of icebergs. Hazelwood retired to his quarters once he gave instructions to the third mate to reposition the ship after passing the icebergs.

Neither Hazelwood nor the third mate realized how far off course the vessel was until it was too late, despite the advanced technology on the vessel. Captain Hazelwood had disembarked earlier that day to conduct business for the ship. He returned that evening to pilot the tanker out of Prince William Sound. Little did he know upon re-boarding that he would be at the center of events leading to an enormous oil spill that would impact 1,300 miles of shoreline, kill thousands of animals, and cost over two billion dollars.

(GED® Testing Service)

Use direct evidence from the reading passage to answer these questions:

1. What event is being described in this reading passage?
2. What technology was turned off before the accident, and why was this important?
3. Why did Captain Hazelwood move the ship out of “the proper shipping lanes”?
4. What caused the ship to run aground?
5. Does the author think Captain Hazelwood was responsible for the accident?
6. What were the long-term environmental effects of this accident?

## Other Juicy Sentences

### Pete's Thumb

They were nearly to the hospital's emergency entrance when Pete looked at the blood-soaked towel— wrapped around the place where his thumb had been—and suddenly realized, in his terrified haste, he had left the table saw running in the garage.

1. Who are the characters?
2. Where are the characters now?
3. Summarize the story in ten words or less
4. Create a timeline of the events of the story (specific details or implied)
5. How does the phrase **terrified haste** add to the tone of the story?
6. Would the following sentence be located before or after the story? Pete decided he would sneak out to his garage workshop and begin working on a Valentine's Day gift for his wife. Please explain your reasoning.
7. How does the definition of the word **nearly** change based on Pete's initial starting point?
8. Where is Pete's focus at the end of the sentence?

### Chainsaw Juggler

Though Pete's father had always boasted of his son's occupational persistence, after many years of trying to regain his waning confidence, Pete mournfully came to the conclusion that he simply didn't have the hands for chainsaw juggling anymore.

### Drawn to Purple

The mosquito, now fully freighted with a delectable meal of a tender, suburban Schnauzer named Buttercup, felt itself magnetically drawn—like the tide to the moon—one ancient celestial lover to another—to the radiant purple aura of the bug zapper hanging in the hemlock tree above Stanley Schnibble's prized purple peony garden