

**Close Reading Essay**  
**MAGIC THESIS STATEMENT AND OUTLINE WORKSHEET**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. “By looking at...”**

This part of the thesis is the analytical (meaning “taking apart”) part of your thesis. Here you are going to state what elements in the soliloquy you will consider in your paper. You need to, paradoxically, be specific, but generalize. Let me explain...

You CANNOT say, “By looking at the words, characters and ideas in this soliloquy...” Why? First of all, it isn’t specific enough. Remember, a good analytical thesis cannot be applied to any other text except the one you are analyzing. You can analyze the words, characters and ideas in ANYTHING. Second of all, it is a listing thesis. You should avoid listing theses, which sound (and are) unsophisticated. Third of all, because I will definitely hand your paper right back to you and you’ll just have to rewrite it anyway.

On the other hand, the excerpts you will be analyzing will use many different techniques and you can’t be SO specific that you say something like, “By looking at the metaphors, similes, allusions, parallelism, rhetorical questions, cause/effect, quotes, facts, and definitions...” Why? Well, obviously, it is just too long. Also, it is still a listing thesis.

So what’s a poor Lit & Comp student to do? Unfortunately, the answer is to think—specifically, you need to find all the techniques the author uses and then ask yourself these questions:

- **Can any of these techniques be grouped together under a more general term?** For example, metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole are all forms of figurative language. Even more generally, they are all used to create imagery. Anaphora, epistrophe, chiasmus, and sometimes antithesis are all forms of parallelism. Even more generally, they are all concerned with syntactical structure.
- **What are some of the “big impressions” of the piece?** This is an even more helpful question to consider. By this, I mean that Shakespeare may use all sorts of techniques, but often these combine to create a certain effect. For example, an author may use a bunch of different examples of figurative language, connotative language and allusions, but they may be focused on a certain theme or used to create a unified impression. In the “To be or not to be” soliloquy, for instance, we analyzed how Shakespeare uses metaphor, repeated images, and an indecisive tone. However, taken together, they had the combined effect of making us wonder about Hamlet’s true intentions and whether or not he is capable of carrying out the revenge plan. So, if you were to write an analysis of the soliloquy, instead of listing every technique he used, you could say something like, “By looking at water images...”

2. **“...we can see that...”**

This is the evaluative part of the thesis, meaning, where you give your opinion. Basically, this is what you believe can be “seen” and your paper will prove it. This is the part where your group needs to come together and think about what is being “shown” through the first part of the thesis (the “by looking at..” part). So, “By looking at water images, we can see Hamlet’s shifts in logic...” which will help to make clear the direction of your thesis.

3. **“this is important because...”**

This is the most wide open part of your thesis statement and will likely be the most difficult. (Some people are tempted to leave this part off, apparently hoping I won’t notice when I read the paper. Don’t do this. I will notice and I’ll stop reading!) Essentially, the question you are answering here is “So what?” Let’s look at the thesis we have so far: “By looking at water imagery, we can see Hamlet’s shifts in logic, which most people don’t see...” This is all well and good, but...”So what” if Shakespeare uses imagery? This is the part of thesis where you need to generalize about the impact of the piece or the ideas within the piece or the implication of the piece. For our sample thesis, we might extrapolate something along the lines that Shakespeare wants readers to question Hamlet’s sanity or resolve. It might sound something like this: “this is important because it makes the reader question whether or not Hamlet was truly insane or just pretending.”

4. **Putting it all together**

So, our thesis ends up being:

**“By looking at water imagery, we can see Hamlet’s shifts in logic, which most people don’t see; this is important because it makes the reader question whether or not Hamlet was truly insane or just pretending.”**

Now, here’s the problem. This is rather long and cumbersome. It also is in the exact wording of the formula. While I WANT you to use the formula on your outlines (to make sure it works), you should REWORD your thesis before you turn in your paper! Often times, you can simply cut out the “triggering” phrases; sometimes you’ll have to rearrange. Just make sure your final thesis still contains all of the elements. For our sample thesis, I would both rearrange, cut out some unnecessary words, and I may also divide it into two sentences:

**“Through repeated water imagery in the in the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy, Shakespeare magnifies the shifts in Hamlet’s logic that occur throughout the play; this makes the reader question whether or not Hamlet was truly insane or just pretending.”**

## Developing a Thesis for a Close Reading Analysis

Directions: Remember, the purpose in doing a close reading is to take a close look at the “parts” to see how they relate to the “whole.” This means that you will look at the parts of the passage (diction, figurative language, rhetorical devices, images, tone, etc.) and compare it to the passage itself (the whole), AND you will take a look at the passage (the part) and compare it to the entire play (the whole). By the entire play, I mean its theme, conflict, motif, tragic element, etc.

Parts of the passage:

Effects of parts on passage/context and purpose of passage:

Relationship to play:

**This should still fit into the Magic Thesis Statement (MTS).**

By looking at \_\_\_\_\_ (the parts of the passage), we can see that \_\_\_\_\_ (effects of parts on passage/context and purpose of passage), this is important because \_\_\_\_\_ (relationship of passage to entire play - theme, conflict, motif, tragic pattern)

Example:

MTS Formula: By looking at **water imagery**, we see **Hamlet's shifts in logic occur throughout the play**; this is important because it **makes the reader question whether Hamlet was truly insane, or just pretending**.

*And here is how you would rewrite to make it sound more natural...*

Through repeated water imagery in the famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy, Shakespeare magnifies the shifts in Hamlet's logic that occur throughout the play; this makes the reader question whether Hamlet was truly insane or just pretending.

Example #2:

MTS Formula: By looking at **shifts in imagery and metaphors and internal structure of questions and debate**, we can see the **magnitude of Hamlet's uncertainty**; this is important because **this uncertainty ultimately destroys him**.

*And here is how you would rewrite to make it sound more natural...*

Through the use of an internal structure of question and debate as well as inconsistencies in imagery and metaphor in the 'O, too too sallied' soliloquy, Shakespeare magnifies the tone of Hamlet's uncertainty which creates his tragic flaw, ultimately destroying him.

## CLOSE READING ESSAY THESIS WORKSHEET:

### Step One: "By looking at..."

List ALL the different techniques used in the soliloquy	Narrow down this list by grouping terms under their most general term	Narrow down this list more by deciding on one or two "big impressions" that are created by the techniques



What is the main impression this piece makes?

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**Step Two: “we can see that...”**

What can you see, based on the overall play? What impression, message or idea is Shakespeare showing you about the character, the situation, or the play in general?

**Step Three: “this is important because...”**

Use a web to brainstorm reasons why what you have so far for a thesis is important:

**Step Four: Write your thesis here using the ‘magic formula’:**

**Step Five: Re-write your thesis in your own words:**