

Your answers to the following assignment

2. Imagine yourself reading something that is challenging, complex poetry or dense prose, something like a contemporary poem, a novel by Henry James, or part of *Finnegans Wake*. Write a description of your state of mind, using at least 15 words.

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I made less noise about this state of mind. Perhaps, then, these answers are less biased.  
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1. When I am reading research for my Honors Thesis, the outside world is blocked out, but in a different way. I am in a highly concentrated state, doing close reading. Sometimes I see the events being depicted in the book in my mind, but not always, depending on the subject being discussed. **I am busy making connections between what I am reading and other texts, rather than being fully caught up in specific text I am reading. I am concerned with the utility of the text- what it can offer me by way of theory, reasoning or evidence.**

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2. I am paying close attention to the words and sentences that the author has chosen. **I'm noticing what the author has chosen to say or not say, and how that effects the story.**

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3. When I sit down to tackle Newton's Opticks, Eisnstein's Relativity, or Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions-as I have been doing since the semester's start for my Literature of Science class-I have reading glasses, a pen in hand (and typically a headache). **I am analyzing every word for rhetorical content as well as trying to decipher and visualize the strange physical and theoretical experiments being presented to me.** It becomes stressful, hard to understand, and frustrating when it doesn't come easy. **I get up, get coffee, clear my head, and try again.** There is no physical stimulus or enjoyment, unless at once I decode the brilliance before me and feel joy at my ability to comprehend Einstein. **Still it is work, I fidget and become irritable, I am wondering what material is test-able and which quotes would enhance my paper,** but I love it-it's a challenge, not as palatable as fiction, but more rewarding.

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4. If I attempt to make "sense" of it, then **I feel distanced; there's less emersion. When I just read it, it's more like listening to music without lyrics.**

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5. When I read dense prose or complex poetry I usually experience a similar response to the one above if I am reading the work for pleasure. However, if I am reading the work in order to analyze and contemplate in an institutional setting the meanings of the piece my state of mind is very different. **Rather than the effusive emotionalism that characterizes pleasure reading, the density and complexity of a work combined with the need to quickly understand the meanings of the work lead to my reading the work for the knowledge of writing style, symbolic systems and repetitions, nuance and the like.** My appreciation becomes less tied to developing a sense of intimacy with the characters and instead becomes focused on the work itself and in general. Thus I find myself often bored and **lapse into daydreaming while I continue to read.** However, if a work is particularly engrossing I notice both the style and empathize simultaneously and rather excitedly.

For instance, when I read Virginia Woolf **I find myself utterly engrossed in both creating an intimacy with the character and her use of language.**

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6. When reading something more complex my mind seems more active in that I evaluate every word, sentence, or stanza, all the time seeking connections and singling in on important details, etc. I am more "concentrated" to the point where I am aware, unlike during my reading of a "pleasure book," of the effort my brain is making to comprehend the text.

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7. 2: In this case, I feel more like I'm trying to solve a puzzle. I focus more on analyzing specific words and phrases, and if it's particularly challenging, I'm often mildly frustrated and feel like I'm faced with a problem. I'm concentrated, but not absorbed as in the first scenario.

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8. When reading something challenging, I repeatedly reread sentences in order to absorb the full meaning of the text. I often become flustered and annoyed by an abundance of references (like in Joyce novels), which inhibit my ability to move through the pages at a steady pace. Also, because it is much more difficult for me to comprehend such novels, I struggle to place myself within the plot and relate to the characters.

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9. 2) **With difficult reading, my mind wanders very easily.** If it's a tough book that I like, such as a martial arts books with specifics techniques and Zen principles, I often get caught up in the "theory" behind these things. If it's a tough book that I'm reading academically, I often "read" without paying attention, then I have to re-read the whole thing! **Doubts and anxieties from the "outside" interrupt me infrequently.** [Or do you mean frequently?]

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10. I need there to be as close to complete silence as I can have in our world of all-encompassing noise. I have to focus all my attention on each word that I read, knowing that even a single word or punctuation mark has been given the ability from the author to change the whole. I try to make connections with the text and sometimes (to the dismay of the New Critics) think about what I know of the author's perspective. **Many times I end up thinking "What was all that about?" and go back and read the poem, paragraph, or what have you over again.**

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11. I feel anxiously inquisitive and confused, **my mind is rapidly trying to make connections** between the words on the page and their meanings / relation to each other. I'm thinking about the last phrase or two while I'm reading the next.

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12. I am totally lost and my mind is trying to figure out what's going on. **I re-read pages, use dictionary, do a little research on internet. Then I go back to the text and try to make sense of the text** by drawing all the resources of my mind and start focusing on each and every word in the case of a complex poem and in the case of the hard prose I just keep reading it hoping that in the process I will suddenly stumble on the meaning (something akin to eureka effect).

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13. 2: In this case I have probably come into it "looking for more." Consequently I will likely not allow myself to be "taken in" and will always be more conscious of the reading experience. I take more out and put more into the actual reading experience. It's not one of those moments where I've been reading for an hour, and I don't realize that I've been sitting there for that long or notice that time has passed, because my attention hasn't wandered anywhere else. **I am very much aware that I am deciding to focus on this reading.**

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14. As I read, **challenging myself to thoroughly understand each word**, phrase, sentence and paragraph, my mind is in a state of **acute concentration**. **I focus on how each word functions** and how each word joins to shape the prose in its entirety. Despite this state of intense immersion, **I am aware of the environment surrounding me—the sound of the clock** ticking, the chill of the air conditioning and the whispers of students studying at a nearby table.

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15. It **may take a great deal of work to remain focused at first**. Eventually I become so involved that I forget about distractions. I think about the work as I go and may take time to contemplate parts that stand out to me.

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16. I **must frequently stop to think over passages** that I have read. **The shape of the narrative takes place in my imagination more during those pauses than while I am actually reading** the words on the page.

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17. The experience of reading a dense poem, for example The Wasteland, elicits from me a **hypnagogic state of intermediate consciousness**. I **fall off into the reverie of florid imagery, but this is fragmented by allusions or images that I do not have in my memory repertoire and therefore can not properly evoke for integration into my imaginative construct**. **Having to break for an internet search or to weight train with a fifteen pound dictionary understandably prevents complete flight from ?actual space and time?.** Once all of the cryptic and/or historic allusions are decoded, a second reading provokes a significantly more fantastical perception.

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Themes:

1. Activity. It feels like work. "Busy," "trying," "making." People get up and do things. (N.B. In terms of the brain's activity, this means planning and using counterfactuals.)
2. Less talk of emotions.
3. Not so clear about awareness of environment and self. Sometimes lost, sometimes not.