<u>Specific Advice about Reading Literature in Terms of Theory</u>

This is something that will be a regular feature of this class. We're starting with Freud, but there are a handful of other influential thinkers that you will be reading over the course of the year in order to apply their ideas to some text that you will be engaging in class.

I do this for a number of reasons. First, these texts have been chosen because they are written by foundational thinkers in their field, and if you take many humanities courses in college, you will be exposed to them again. Second, it helps you to develop a specialized language to talk about some big, recurring ideas in literature: psychology, feminism, social and economic class, and existential philosophy. Finally, in terms of the AP test, these thinkers give you a ready approach to write essays about some of the important works of literature that you will be reading throughout the year. With a little work and planning on your part, they can be used to write some pretty impressive essays on the AP exam itself.

You have to know what you're talking about.

> There is zero excuse for misapplications of theoretical material. When you make a dodgy call about a literary text, it is more excusable, since we are talking about inferences (which, by definition, are about things that are left unsaid in the text). When you screw up a theoretical approach, it just means that you were too lazy to take the time to truly understand, representing a failure of reading comprehension. Your standard should be "mastery," not "I sort-of, kind-of know what this is all about." Stop thinking like a high school student.

You should not be attempting to prove the theoretical approach is correct. The theory is merely your tool for analysis.

> You are making an argument about the literary text, not the secondary source. Make it clear what approach you are using, but do not spend time justifying your approach (at least not in the limited scope of the writing you will be doing for this class).

Jargon has to be explained, and it NEVER replaces the need for analysis.

> "Jargon" is merely the specialized language particular to a certain field or discipline. However, unless you are writing specifically for that specialized audience, you must explain what the word or concept means before you apply it. Even when you are lucky enough to have a readership that shares exactly the same knowledge and conceptual understanding of what you are writing about (maybe when you get to graduate school?), simply using a catch-phrase is never a replacement for applying that concept *specifically* in terms of the primary text that you are analyzing. In other words, you have to *apply* the concept-- explaining exactly how it works in terms of the primary text.

> The other problem that can arise with jargon is overuse. Even in real academic literature, extensive use of specialized terms becomes exhausting over time.

Don't try to do everything.

> In this class, you will never be writing at such length that this is even a realistic option. Pick a couple of key concepts and use them in your analysis. Do not turn your writing into a list of correspondences. Go deep, not wide.