

These are the nine **big ideas** that we will uncover and explore this term. Each idea consists of **understandings** (concepts) and **essential questions**. We will assess your grasp of these ideas in tutorial discussions, exercises, assignments, and the final exam.

Legend:

Big Idea	Assessment
Understandings	Essential Questions

Part 1: Knowledge of Shakespeare

1. Canonicity	Tutorials, Exam
Shakespeare as cultural institution . He is at the centre of the literary canon, but this is as much a function of his reception/our culture as of his intrinsic qualities. Some of his plays are more ‘canonical’ than others.	What is the meaning of ‘Shakespeare’ in our culture? How have his adaptations, editions, performances, &c. influenced this meaning? How has it developed through history? Why are some plays viewed as more canonical than others? Are those views valid and ahistorical? What’s the difference between popularity and greatness?

2. Close Reading & Language	E1, E2, A1
Reading Shakespeare requires mental paraphrase (into modern English), but we must also appreciate the texts as they appear on the page. An interpretation must consider its form; its speaker (voice, tone); its argument; its structure; its setting or context; its imagery; its sound and rhythm; its language (syntax, diction, and word meanings); and its rhetorical devices (especially metaphors, similes, and symbols).	How do you know you understand the text? How do you read the lines, <u>and</u> between the lines? How do you interpret the results of your close reading? What are the (slow) reading habits that encourage close reading? How do you recognize these elements of a text, and what do you do with this information? How do you compare two or more passages? How do you paraphrase, and why?

3. Genres, Modes, & Formats	Tutorials, Exam
Shakespeare as body of work . Shakespeare wrote in five genres (tragedy, comedy, history, romance, and problem play) and a range of modes (pastoral, elegiac, amatory). We must recognize them, and how they shape his texts. He also wrote in non-dramatic forms: sonnets and narrative poems. And all of these were printed/circulated in various formats (manuscripts, quartos, folios).	How do the conventions (genre, mode) of a text inform its internal elements/structure? How do they influence our expectations? Should they? How were Shakespeare’s words first circulated? How did he adapt his sources? How does the history and process of editing Shakespeare affect our readings of him today?

4. Performance	A2
To understand Shakespeare’s plays, we must see and imagine them in performance. Then we can	How does Shakespeare arrange the action of a text? Where does he start and stop the narrative?

understand them as stories that unfold through time, and that depend on the variable motives and knowledge of discrete characters.	How does your knowledge of a play's theatrical/interpersonal elements help you understand motives, and the unfolding narrative?
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5. Biography	Tutorials, Exam
Shakespeare as the man in history . Since his death, writers have tried many ways to describe his experience, to explain his ability to write these plays. But he is ultimately inscrutable, and his legacy is more important than his experience.	What relationship does the writer's biography bear on our interpretation of the text? What is the tension between authorial intention and critical interpretation? What do Shakespeare's works tell us about him? Are some more 'biographical' than others?

6. Historicity / Shakespeare's Culture	Tutorials, Exam
Shakespeare wrote in and for a specific culture. His theatre/audiences and publications/readers were very different from ours. We must understand this context to interpret his texts.	What was Shakespeare's theatre like? How does it affect our interpretations of his plays?

Part 2: Writing Skills

7. Questions & Arguments	Tweets, E3, E5, A3
Ignorance is the beginning of wisdom. Asking the right questions lets us begin to ask new and more complex questions. Our arguments in response to these questions must have a counter-argument. They must also be carefully structured.	What are the kinds of questions we ask of literary texts? How do we formulate them? How can we make logical and clear arguments? How should essays take a position rather than discuss a topic? What is the function of an introduction, a paragraph, a conclusion? How do you outline an argument? Will criticism ever be definitive?

8. Evidence & Interpretation	E3, E4, A1, A2, A3
A compelling argument is a resourceful argument: it uses textual evidence to make a convincing case. It uses the appropriate formats to quote the text and cite its sources.	How do you gather evidence? How should you read and annotate? How do parts of a text relate to other parts? How do you compare texts? How do you know what you believe to be true? What are the correct ways to quote a text, and to cite your sources? What is interpretation? How does it construct knowledge? How are facts different from opinions? Does authorial intent matter?

9. Revision & Editing	E3, E4, A3
Good criticism is never a first draft. We must learn the habits of self-editing and revision to make our writings more clear, precise, and direct. We must learn the stages of writing: from notes to outlines to successive drafts.	What is the purpose of editing and revising? How does clear, precise, and direct language do a good service to our thinking? How do we recognize issues, and revise our own writing?