

For this workshop, you should assemble into sub-groups of your project group: preferably 3 or 4 people per group.

This workshop will allow you some focused work on your synthesis paper. Some of this work will be primarily individual, of course, but I encourage you to talk through and exchange ideas as you go. Each of you will be at a different stage in the writing process, but everyone should have some significant material to work with and discuss. Even if you have a full draft, the exercises in this workshop will be worth going through to evaluate your work and are good practice in any case for future projects.

As you work, Tyler and Meghan will be returning your Seminar Papers and chatting with you briefly about your writing. Time permitting, we'll have a little grammar and style bonanza before the end of the morning.

Writing &  
Literature  
Workshop

**Week**

**Four**

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Thesis  
Analysis

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Synthesis  
Structural  
Map

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Imagining  
Language

# Thesis Analysis

(Toulmin argumentation structure)

Remember that a THESIS is a CLAIM with multiple REASONS (supporting claims) attached.

A working thesis statement such as you'll develop can be a clunky thing and may not end up in your paper word for word. Nonetheless, if you can write out the whole thing clearly and concisely, you'll have an easier time using it to drive your essay.

An example of a THESIS is as follows:

(CLAIM...)

Constraint-based writing is a challenge to the artistic cult of genius

...by/because...

(REASONS[supporting claims])

- constraint-based writing emphasizes the potential of pre-existing material,
- constraint-based writing relies on attainable knowledge instead of mystified and nebulous artistic sensibility, ...etc.

The sample CLAIM above is either **definitional** or **categorical**, depending on how I decide to treat the "Y" term ("challenge to the artistic...").

The other CLAIM types are:

**Evaluative:** X is a good / bad / fair / useful Y

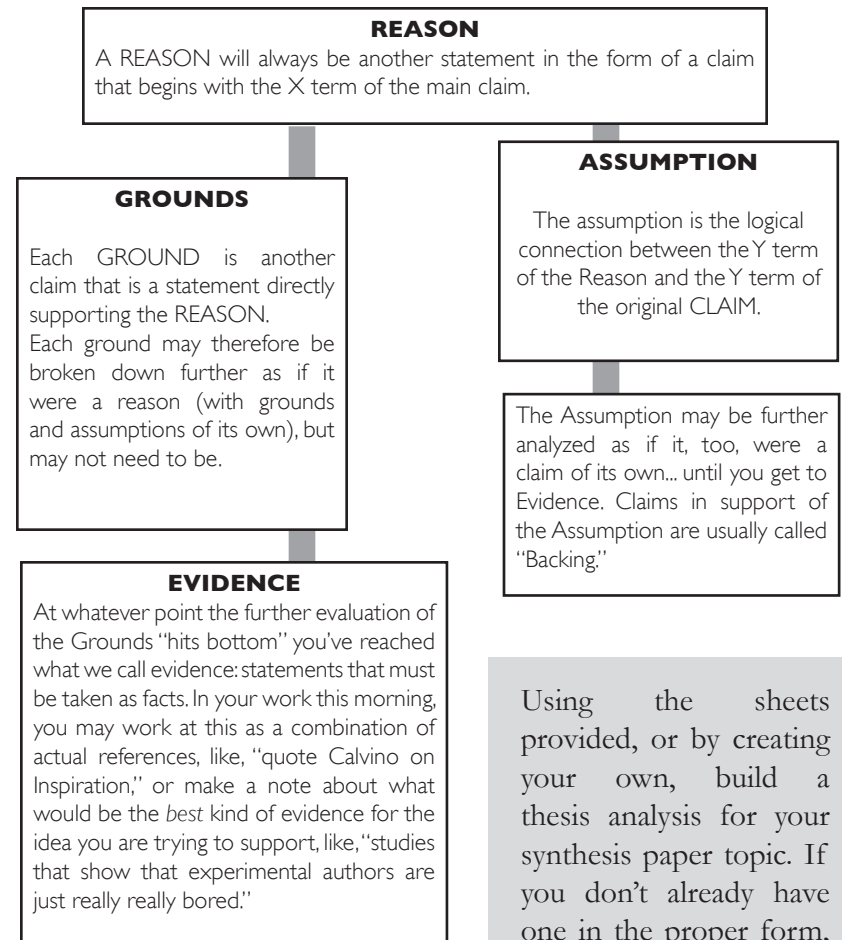
**Causal:** X causes / lead to / allows Y

**Analogical:** X is like Y

(One claim type that I don't want to recommend, but is out there, is the Proposal: "Someone should X")

The THESIS ANALYSIS is the process of elaborating the GROUNDS and the ASSUMPTIONS contingent upon each of the REASONS.

The schematic of the analysis looks something like this:



Using the sheets provided, or by creating your own, build a thesis analysis for your synthesis paper topic. If you don't already have one in the proper form, you'll need to develop a CLAIM with REASONS to work with.

# Synthesis Structural Map

Because the thesis analysis generates a non-linear description of the ideas in your essay (something like a mind-web), it's useful to recast the bits and pieces of that analysis into something sequential.

The best way to begin thinking about this is to think of your essay the same way you think about a conventional dramatic story: with a beginning, middle, and end; with an initial period of establishing setting, characters, and attitudes; with the encountering of conflicts, a problem to be solved, or a mission to be undertaken; with a rising action in which the hero (you and the reader simultaneously) acquire useful items (terms, concepts, images, quotations) and gain allies (scholars, writers); with adventures along the way and strange encounters (texts to explore, examples that test your concepts, quandries to resolve); with a climax and a dénouement (conclusion and assessment of where we've arrived).

To build a structural map, the two analogies to the story scenario above that seem to work the best are, in fact (1) a MAP—of the type found at the outset of fantasy quest novels, and (2) a Board Game, the kind in which a linear trail flows through various territories and compels one to go through all of the dramas outlined above.

Using one of the large sheets of paper provided, and whatever materials you like, create a structural map of your synthesis paper using these principles. Feel free to embellish, but take it seriously. Detail as specifically as you can the journey that the reader will take through your essay. Be aware, as you go, of how topic sentences, paragraphs, references to the thesis, transitions, citations, and digressions will flow through your paper and help the reader to follow the trail of your ideas.

## IMAGINING LANGUAGE

The selections in your packet were pulled from a massive anthology, *Imagining Language*. The editors culled materials from across the centuries in which they saw the presence of “linguistic exceptions,” resulting in a catalog of deviants and madmen, you might say.

*Get out your packets and review the sections from Imagining Language as you consider the notes below and the questions/prompts in **bold**.*

### **TRANSPPOSITIONS**

In this section, the editors are developing their particular way of talking about language. If we remember some of the nuances of Calvino's sentiment that the aim of Literature is to escape the confines of Language [to paraphrase, “C&G”], and Foucault's image of Language as a vast and incomprehensible being that we half-wittingly participate in, then we are on the right road to the imaginative leap that McCaffrey and Rasula take here.

**What is your definition of language? What is literature's relationship to language?**

Such a beast as language, in its component parts (tropes, words, letters, sounds), has a biology like any other: cells, neurons, electrical impulses, nerves, organs, and so on. In the frame of such an analogy, the editors can imagine some aspects of meaning as *parasitic* or *viral*. We can also wonder at the nature of language as a code—genetic code?—and as cipher.

Be sure to wrap your head carefully around the “parasite” concept: “a linguistic microbe or infection that occupies the transit of signification.”

**Find applications of the concept of a “parasite” using a few of the texts we’ve read (any of them).**

Consider how the conception of language as a code relates to “universal language schemes.” If there were just one language, it would function as an unquestionable code for the world: *word* would equal *thing* without the persistence of a viral or supplementary or swerving meaning.

**Discuss the desirability of a universal language or of a “perfectly coded” language.**

**Materiality comes up quite a bit, but in a few different ways. In what significant ways (in relation to literature & writing) is language *material*?**

## **METHOD**

In this section, some new metaphors for the function of language and poetry may be useful: the concept of a constellation, a traced fragile network of points in the void, can be paired with *syzygy* to build a cosmic sense of language’s potentiality.

In this context, the word *form* takes on a different urgency. If the *material* and *viral* view of language and meaning suggests a biological and evolutionary sense of form, the sense of form as constellation or tracery seems to lead artists to more cosmic analogies. For instance, *form* is opposed to the *void* and the *chaos* that precede and perhaps under gird the cosmos.

**Discuss *form* in relation to speech and silence, word and blank. What does language give form to? Can anything be said to exist *without* form?**

## **ALPHABETIC DIMENSIONS**

Some of the connections between McCaffrey’s and Rasula’s ideas and mathematical thinking should be obvious. Others are not so. But their manner of thinking is consistently of the type that lends depth and complexity to our *sensibility* for language and writing, in the same way that our study and practice of mathematics will deepen our *sensibility* for mathematical thinking.

It occurs to me that Mathematics is a constant investigation of its

own medium, seeking out the potential of its foundations and its speculations, the unexplored territory, the unasked questions. Perhaps it can be said that all that we now take to be understood in Mathematics are those *exceptional* and rather uncommon cases of extraordinary inquiry and discovery. In *Imagining Language*, we see that language, too, has its history of exceptions, discoveries, and inquiries, though often that history has been dismissed in favor of the literary products of language that have produced and consecrated cultural norms—the balancing-your-checkbook type of mathematics.

**Some writers argue that great literature is that which implicitly asks or urges us to ask these questions: what is writing? what is literature? what is language? How, in your experience, do literary works suggest the need to answer such questions?**

So, in general, let me propose the following: fiction is the art and science of investigating the capacities of language. What madness follows from this pursuit or engenders it will vary. Certainly there's a sympathy between the Wadlin character in "Coconuts" and, perhaps, a Queneau or Perec. Surely, too, the re-discovery of human-based calculation in Asimov's tale is reflected in an image of language that is malleable, monstrous, and within our grasp.

**What kinds of questions can literature answer? What kinds of knowledge can it produce that other media cannot?**