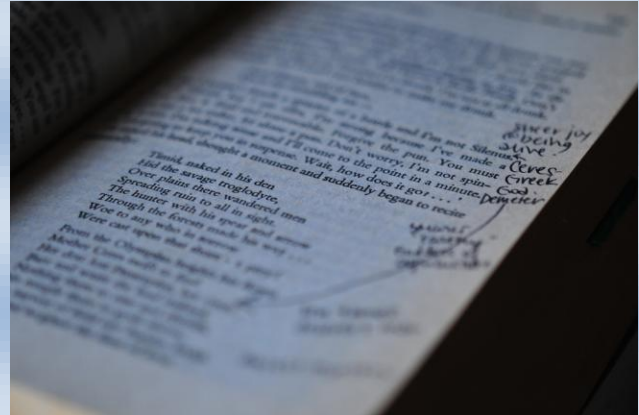


## Critical Reading

Students enrolled in writing courses in the English Department and Writing Program at Lane can expect to read challenging, college-level texts in different modes (digital, print, video, etc.) and in a variety of genres (scholarly, popular, literary, etc.). The focus is on learning to **read rhetorically**, or, in other words, reading with special attention to multiple characteristics of a text in order to



better **understand** how those textual features come together to make meaning. Those characteristics include things like structure, tone, diction or word choice, patterns, figures of speech, and so on. Reading rhetorically helps students to **comprehend** difficult texts as well as to recognize and try out a variety of methods for **creating texts** that **communicate** effectively with diverse audiences for differing purposes.

**Reading rhetorically also means reading to respond.**

When students read to respond, they engage in what composition scholar Peter Elbow calls the “believing and doubting game,” first listening emphatically to what a writer/thinker has to say on an issue, seeking to understand and honor a “text” in its own terms, then stepping back **to ask critical questions**. Students learn to “**enter the conversation**” already taking place among peers, critics, and scholars on a variety of issues or topics. **Entering or joining the conversation** means students develop an **understanding** of the language (including “jargon” or specialized terms and language), the “rules” or conventions of the dialogue, and the values of a particular community of insiders or experts—groups that are also commonly referred to in academia as “discourse communities”—and then adding their own voices and ideas to that conversation, often in writing. The metaphor of entering the conversation requires students to actively **engage** with texts—that is, to read for the purpose of responding to the texts and ideas of others critically with the understanding that writing is “dialogic,” as critic Mikhail Bakhtin put it. That is, **writing is formed only in the context of social relations with other human beings**, and is designed “for active perception, involving attentive reading and inner responsiveness, and for organized, printed reaction in . . . book reviews, critical surveys . . . and so on” (Vološinov 95).