**Let’s improve evaluation of theories**

**MOST IMPORTANT: You must not repeat the same evaluations over and over using the same language.** It is likely that you might make the same evaluation of a theory three times: once in the introduction, once in a body paragraph and once in the conclusion. This does not give you license to use exactly the same vocabulary! You need to think of fresh ways of saying the same thing.

**From the syllabus/task description:**

“The focus question should allow them to **evaluate how effective these theoretical approaches have been in exploring and producing the close reading.**”

Note the emphasis on “**how effective**” the approaches have been. You need to use the word ‘effective’ and synonyms in your evaluation of the **usefulness** of theory. What are some appropriate synonyms for effective? You could consider **‘productive’, ‘efficacious’, ‘fruitful, ‘powerful’, ‘helpful’, ‘provides compelling evidence’, ‘provides convincing evidence’, ‘useful’, ‘very useful’, ‘certainly useful’, ‘effectively provides insight’**.

Synonyms for useful: ‘**helpful’, ‘effective’, ‘of use’, ‘is suitable’, X theorist’s concept Y argues that, this concept is expanded upon by, the application of this theory provides further evidence of**

Don’t forget that one or more of your theoretical approaches may be relatively ineffectual. You could use evaluate phrases like **‘is ineffectual in showing’, ‘provides limited/insufficient evidence’, ‘provides limited evidence’, ‘is comparatively weak’**, **only partially reveals** and so on.

**From syllabus/task objectives:**

“Demonstrate **understanding of relationships among and within aspects of the selected theories** in order to develop and explore a focus question and the associated close reading/s of the selected complex literary text/s”

Here you situate the theoretical approach, concept or strategy in a school of theory, showing how this theory relates to earlier and later theories and to contemporary theory. You won’t need to cover all of these aspects for every theory, just the most relevant ones. E.g. Lacan owes a debt to Freud but you don’t need to mention Freud’s inspiration. When you are explaining the relationships between terms and concepts and different theoretical approaches, be concise. Do not include any **unnecessary** biographical information about the theorist, for instance.

Try: Theorist X is indebted to theorist Y, drew inspiration from the work of theorist Y, belongs to the same school of theory as theorist Y, expanded the concepts of theorist Y, refuted the theory of theorist Y, used the concepts of theorist Y to develop, owes a debt to theorist Y,

Use the correct text connectors for compare and contrast. E.g. **Compare:** is similar to, both, also, too, as well, similarly, alike, have in common, in comparison, compl**e**ment one another, affirms, concedes, idea concurs with, confirms, echoes, supports, verifies

**Contrast:** on the other hand, however, but, in contrast, while, whereas, unlike, on the contrary, however, contrasted with, although, even though, conversely, different, unalike, while, but, theorist X’s concept, is more/less relevant/applicable, counters/**disagrees/opposes/criticizes/refutes/disputes/denies/objects/rejects**

**The trick is to use the right word in the context!**

“Evaluate the **strengths and limitations** of those aspects of the selected theories that were used to produce close reading/s of the complex literary text/s and to explore a focus question.”

**Synonyms for strengths**: is a potent tool/strategy, is a robust strategy for, effectively reveals/uncovers/illuminates/shows/demonstrates, is applicable, this theory addresses, assists in understanding

**Synonyms for limitations**: is restricted in what it reveals, is relatively inadequate, is by itself insufficient to reveal..,, reveals minimal evidence, provides scant evidence, only partially reveals, is by itself inadequate to fully explain, provides only a fragmentary explanation, this approach alone is limited,

“Evaluate the close reading/s of the selected complex literary text/s, making explicit the aspects of the theories that underpin these.” Evaluate your own reading/s. What did your reading/s allow you to see and understand which was not apparent in an invited reading?

**Evaluation of theories**

**How can you evaluate the usefulness, strengths and weaknesses of a theory?**

1. You can see what is revealed when **you** apply the theory. Do you understand something more clearly or in more detail/depth when the theory is applied? What new insights did you gain?
2. You must be precise and concise when explaining new insights.

* What aspect of the character is revealed which illuminates their motivation/reasons for particular behaviour?
* What behaviour, thoughts and feelings are revealed which allow a more complex representation of the character’s /motivation to emerge?
* What **ideology is unpacked** which allows you to better understand **the power relations** in the novel?
* What naturalized ideology is unpacked through your examination of binary oppositions? What power relations does this normalized ideology conceal?
* What new understanding do you have of a character who has been interpellated by ideology? How exactly have they been ‘hailed’? What are the consequences of this interpellation? What dominant ideologies does the character adopt? What evidence is there of this interpellation and the consequences for the character?
* What does this theoretical approach allow you to see that a previous approach did not reveal?

**Above all, vary your vocabulary when evaluating.**

Here are some synonyms for reveals: uncovers, illuminates, shows, unveils, demonstrates, demonstrates the extent of, allows an exploration of deeper interpretations, allows a greater understanding of the complexity of, assists in understanding, highlight, provides fresh insight

1. You can read up on your theories in order to compare and contrast them. How did X theorist adapt Y’s theory? What new elements did he/she add?  Understanding this will allow you to evaluate what theory X reveals that theory Y did not reveal. **This is VIP.**

* Remember to use appropriate vocabulary for comparing and contrasting as shown above.
* If using quotes from academic texts to compare and contrast theorists (e.g. Saussure and Derrida), choose your quotes with discernment and avoid any repetition of the same ideas. Compare and contrast approaches and concepts concisely, using precise vocabulary and appropriate terms from literary theory. E.g. *Derrida’s concept of violent hierarchies demonstrates that Saussure’s semiotic analysis requires supplementary tools in order to reveal ideologies underpinning discourses in texts.*

1. Ask Professor Google to take you to sites that evaluate theory using key words like critique, weaknesses, strengths etc. Here you might find evaluations of theory from literary critics that you can quote from or paraphrase.

Evaluation exemplar:

Past student: *Life of Pi – note* ***the high modality, correct text connectors and actual explanation*** *of what is revealed.*

*It is* ***clearly evident*** *that both psychoanalytical approaches are* ***highly useful*** *in exploring the ability of Pi’s psyche to balance his morality and instincts. The application of Freud’s theory of the id, ego and superego* ***clearly demonstrate*** *the plurality of Pi’s internalized sense of self. His superego, based on his religion, creates a strong sense of morality that forces the separation of his id from his psyche.* ***Similarly,*** *Lacan’s theory of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic* ***explains*** *the separation of Pi’s primitive animalistic desires from his conscious mind.* ***However, unlike Freud****, Lacan’s concept of the Law of the Father recognizes man as a cultural being and accounts for the presence of cultural discourses operating within language.*

***Additionally,*** *Lacan’s theory of ‘the other’* ***explicitly explains*** *the censorship of primitive desires, whereas* ***Freud only implicitly******refers*** *to the separation of repressed desires from the conscious psyche.* ***Furthermore,*** *a Lacanian approach* ***allows*** *for the explanation of Pi’s growth from cannibalism to civilization.* ***Thus,*** *it can be said that* ***a Lacanian approach allows for a deeper interpretation of Pi’s psyche*** *and has* ***more clearly illuminated*** *how Pi balances his primitive instincts and his morality.*

Please use the Evaluation and Synthesis document for more tips. Use appropriate and varied text connectors and verbs of attribution.