



The Close Reading Starter Toolkit

for Secondary 1 & 2 (IP Years 1–2) students

1 WHY CLOSE READING MATTERS

If you look at the top IP schools' own English and Language Arts pages, one thing keeps showing up: they don't just want students who can summarise a text — they want students who can notice, question and interpret one. That is close reading, and it sits underneath literary analysis, comprehension, argument, oral commentary and, eventually, GP and H2 Literature.

Most Secondary 1 and 2 students already sense there is a “better answer” somewhere — they just haven't been given a repeatable way to get to it. This toolkit gives you one: a six-step chain you can run on **any** sentence, in **any** unseen passage, in **any** subject that asks you to read closely. Work through it in order — the method, then the worked example, then the drills. There are no marks here, only practice.

2 THE RES CLOSE-READING CHAIN

Six questions, asked in order, on one small detail at a time — a word, a phrase, an image, a structural choice. Never skip a step. Most weak analysis happens because a student jumps from Step 3 straight to Step 6.

1

OBSERVATION

What exactly is on the page? Just describe it — no interpretation yet.



2

EVIDENCE

Which word, phrase, structural choice or detail proves what you just noticed?



3

METHOD

What has the writer actually done? Name the technique — this is only the halfway point.



4

EFFECT

What response, emphasis or relationship does this choice create in the reader?



5

MEANING

What does this suggest about character, attitude, conflict or idea?



6

SIGNIFICANCE

Why does this matter — to the text as a whole, or to the reader?

The one rule that changes everything: “The writer uses a metaphor to create imagery” stops at Step 3 and guesses at Step 4 — it never says what the metaphor actually means. That sentence could be glued onto almost any metaphor in any text, which is exactly how you know it isn't analysis yet. Real analysis is a sentence that could *only* be about this specific quotation.

3 WORKED EXAMPLE: WATCHING THE CHAIN IN ACTION

Read this short original passage once for the story, then we'll zoom into one sentence together.

On her first morning at the new school, Mei kept her timetable folded into a small, hard square in her fist, as if it might dissolve the moment she let it open. The corridor swallowed her name before the teacher had even finished saying it. She found a seat at the back, angled her chair very slightly toward the door, and did not take out her pencil case until the girl beside her had taken out hers first.

Let's zoom into: *"kept her timetable folded into a small, hard square in her fist, as if it might dissolve the moment she let it open"*

Step	Applied to this quotation
1 • Observation	Mei holds her timetable tightly, folded up small, rather than reading it or putting it away.
2 • Evidence	"small, hard square" • "as if it might dissolve"
3 • Method	A simile ("as if it might dissolve") plus tactile, compressed diction ("small, hard square").
4 • Effect	The object shrinks under the description exactly as Mei is trying to shrink — the reader feels her need to take up less space.
5 • Meaning	Mei is treating a piece of paper as something fragile and dangerous — which really reveals how fragile <i>she</i> feels, not the timetable.
6 • Significance	It sets up Mei's guardedness before she speaks a single line — her body language, not dialogue, carries the reader's first understanding of her.

Now compress it into one analytical sentence:

"Through the simile of the timetable 'dissolving' the moment it is opened, the writer suggests that Mei is guarding herself as carefully as the paper — her anxiety is expressed through an object long before it is expressed through speech."

4 PRACTICE DRILL 1 · THE COLD ANNOTATION SPRINT (8 MIN)

Read the passage once. Then choose **just three** details worth annotating — not everything. Set a timer for 8 minutes.

The new hawker stall had been open for three weeks, and still the old man next door refused to look at it. Every morning he arranged his own chilli bottles in the exact same row, a small red wall between the two counters. His daughter kept asking why he wouldn't just say hello. He would answer by wiping the counter again, in the same six strokes, though it was already clean.

Detail 1 — What did you notice, and what does it suggest?

Detail 2 — What did you notice, and what does it suggest?

Detail 3 — What did you notice, and what does it suggest?

Now, in 2 minutes: one whole-text thesis sentence. (What is this extract really about, beneath the surface story?)

5 PRACTICE DRILL 2 · QUOTATION ZOOM (10 MIN)

One quotation can often be read more than one way. Strong readers generate several possible inferences *before* deciding which is strongest — instead of grabbing the first idea that comes to mind.

"He would answer by wiping the counter again, in the same six strokes, though it was already clean."

Inference A

Inference B

Inference C

Now rank them, strongest to weakest, and say why in one sentence each.

1st	
2nd	
3rd	

What makes an inference “strong”? It is precise (not vague), it is provable directly from this exact wording (not just plausible in general), and it goes beyond the obvious surface reading. “He is calm” is weak. “He repeats a controlled, familiar action because it is easier to manage than the daughter’s question” is strong.

6 THE FEATURE-SPOTTING REPAIR

“Feature-spotting” is naming a device without explaining its specific meaning. It is the single most common reason a competent-sounding paragraph still doesn’t score well. Here is how to repair it.

WEAK	STRONG
“The writer uses a metaphor to create imagery.”	“The metaphor of the ‘red wall’ of chilli bottles suggests the old man is building a barrier out of something ordinary, showing how deliberately he keeps his distance.”

Notice: the strong version names *which* device, quotes the *exact* words, and explains a meaning that could not be copy-pasted onto a different quotation.

Your turn. Use this sentence stem to repair each weak sentence below.

The [device] of “____” suggests ____, which creates the effect of ____ because ____.

Repair this: “The writer uses repetition to emphasise the point.”

Repair this: “The short sentence creates impact.”

7 SELF-CHECK: KNOW YOUR OWN WRITING

We use these codes at the studio to give fast, precise feedback. Before you hand in any piece of analytical writing, run it against this checklist yourself — catching your own pattern is the fastest way to fix it for good.

Code	Means	Ask yourself
LIT	Literal misunderstanding	Did I actually understand what happens in this line, before interpreting it?
INF	Unsupported inference	Can I point to the exact words that justify this idea — or am I guessing?
EV	Weak or irrelevant evidence	Is this quotation the best proof available, or just the first one I found?
FS	Feature-spotting	Have I named a device without explaining its specific meaning here?
AN	Thin analysis	Did I stop at Step 3 or 4 of the Chain, instead of reaching Meaning and Significance?
TH	Weak thesis	Could an intelligent reader disagree with my thesis — or is it just a description?
LANG	Grammar / precision	Is every sentence grammatically controlled and precisely worded?

Reflect, in one or two sentences each:

· Which code shows up most often in my own writing? · Which step of the Close-Reading Chain do I most often skip? · What is one thing I will do differently on my next unseen passage?

KEEP GOING



In our IP Foundation Programme (Years 1–2), the Close-Reading Chain is just Teaching Note 1 of a full one-year, 40-week architecture — covering literature, writing craft, argument, rhetoric and media, speaking, research literacy and independent reading, built against what leading IP schools themselves publicly emphasise. **Weekly small-group or 1:1 lessons** give students a visible, evidence-based progression system — for both student and parent.

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