

UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

CLOSE READING AN EMAIL

Close reading can seem like a complicated or specialized academic skill – but the fact is that we all do close reading every single day! We all read “between the lines” of emails, books, movies, and social interactions, and that is essentially what close reading is: reading small details and weighing them in context to arrive at a larger conclusion.

Take a look at the email below and see if you can decode what’s going on:

Dear Bob,

Good to see you. Thanks for going with me to dinner and the movies. It was interesting overall to hear about your research interests. I’m impressed with the enormous amount of time you spend in the lab and at the library. You are clearly very devoted to and diligent about your work.

But, unfortunately I won’t be able to join you for the Celtics game next week due to a yearly commitment. Good luck with your new experiments. I hope they go well, especially since they mean so much to you.

Best,

Carol

Things to consider as you decode this email:

1. What is its structure? Formal, informal, or a mix?
2. What is the tone?
3. What kind of unspoken meaning can you infer from the sentences? How do you know whether or not a second date is likely to occur?
4. Are there double entendres?
5. What is the hidden message? (Hint: look for an acrostic)

Credit: Lisa Rourke and Robert Cochran, University Writing Program

The Brandeis University Writing Program, including the Writing Center, First-Year Writing, and Writing in the Majors, offers support for writing throughout the community, including undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff.

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