

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
**IDENTIFYING YOUR TERMS**

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help you identify the key terms of your main argument—the concepts that are doing a lot of work in your central claim.

**Readings:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599)

**Instructions:**

1. Read through your “argument statement” and list out the key *topics* (things you are making claims about) and *concepts* (ideas you’re using to make claims).
2. Note that the name of the text—the word “*Hamlet*”—will need to be in your list somewhere (since that’s the central topic you’re making a claim about).
3. Consider the question of authorial intent: are you making a claim about how Shakespeare wrote some aspect of *Hamlet* and why? Would you like to be making such a claim? If so, then the word “Shakespeare” will need to be in your key terms.
4. From your list, select *five* key terms—these are basically just the words that you know will definitely need to be in your thesis. (Space them out—you’ll be doing a quick conceptual map.)
5. Sometimes, writing a thesis is simply about figuring out the shortest way to articulate the relationships among your key terms. Draw in those relationships above.
  - Aim to establish links of *causality* and *chronology*: *who or what* brings *who or what* into existence?
  - Note that *motives* for doing something chronologically come before *strategies* for doing it. And *strategies* for doing something come before the actual existence of *the thing itself*. Try to establish the proper order in which your key terms come into play and act upon each other.
  - Note also that you may need to add some words to describe the nature of the relationships.
6. Using your conceptual map of your key terms, try writing out a thesis. Shorter is better. Try to do it in one sentence. The definition of good writing is: being able to convey big, important ideas in a short amount of space.