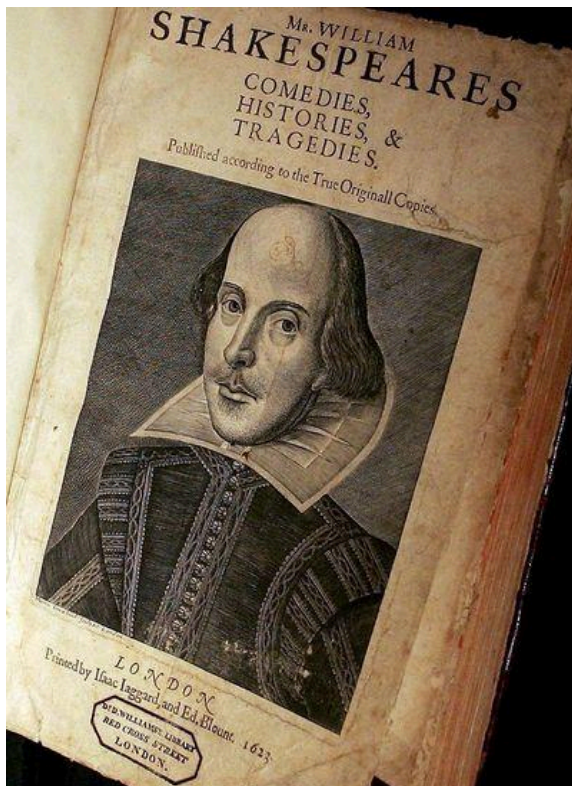


## Tips for reading Shakespeare

**Don't panic** if you have trouble!

Some people come to college having already read a lot of Shakespeare's work, while some have no familiarity at all, and some parts of his plays are more difficult than others. You'll get a hang of it! If you're concerned, please come see me (check syllabus for location/availability) and we'll go through some passages together.

**Use a good edition.** It's tempting to use online editions because they're free, and they can at least help you keep up if you experience a delay in acquiring your books. To do well in the class, however, you'll need a copy of the play that has line numbers (so that we can all more or less find the same place in the text during discussion) and footnotes (explanations of difficult words or unfamiliar references, usually found at the bottom or along the side of the page).



Folger, Signet, Pelican, Barnes & Noble, Oxford, Norton, and Arden are some of the editions that you're most likely to find online or in bookstores, and they're all fine; if you aren't sure, send me a link/text me a picture of the book and I'll let you know. Avoid the inexpensive "complete works" editions you often see at bookstore chains; they're a pain to carry around and they're cheap for a reason. **DO NOT** get No Fear Shakespeare editions, which "translate" the text into modern English instead of providing footnotes; you'll miss a lot of important information and won't develop the ability to comprehend challenging language, which is one of our goals in this course.

**Take your time.** Don't skip over something that confuses you—take the time to figure it out. Check the footnotes first; if that doesn't help, look it up in a dictionary. Remember that sometimes Shakespeare uses words whose meanings have changed over time, so check the Oxford English Dictionary, which provides examples of how words were used over the centuries. This way, when you look up the word, you can see what it meant around the time that Shakespeare was using it.



The print OED is really huge. Fortunately, you can access it online through GALILEO.

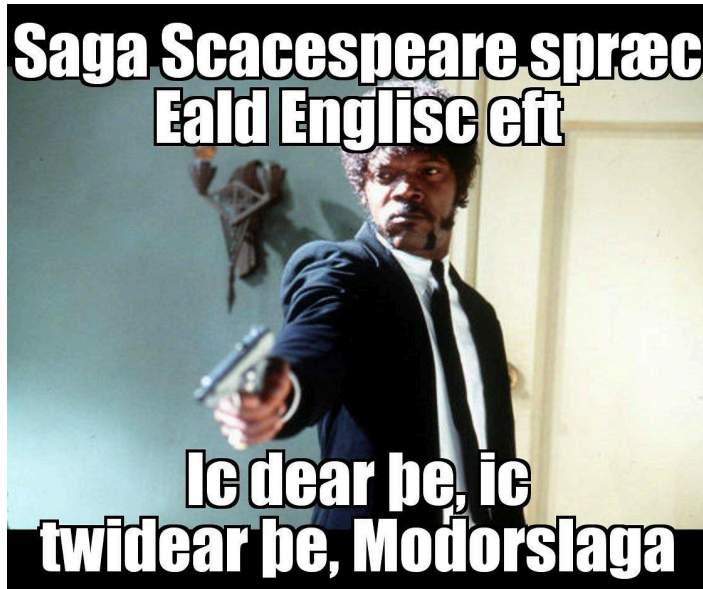
**Take notes as you go.** The blank verse form Shakespeare uses can make it easy to lose track of where sentences begin and end. Jot down your ideas about what seems to be going on as you read so that you can follow what the characters are saying.

**Listen/watch in addition to reading.** Shakespeare's work was meant to be performed and often makes more sense when you hear it spoken aloud. Try reading it out loud on your own or arrange readings with classmates. Check YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime, etc. to see if there's a film version of the play or someone's uploaded a recording of a stage production. Search online for sound recordings.



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**Stage your own mental performance.** When you're reading a play, it's easy to forget who's onstage or what they're doing if they're not currently speaking, especially since Shakespeare doesn't have a lot of stage directions. Pay attention to who's in the scene; try to visualize what they might look like, where they could be standing/moving, etc. Sometimes it helps to pick an actor who you think would be a good fit for the role and imagine them as you're reading.



**Think about Shakespeare's possible motives.** Shakespeare wrote in a type of English called Early Modern English; grammatically, it's not too different from what we speak now, but some of the words he uses aren't common anymore or have changed meaning. Also, he's writing for the theatre—everyday people in his time didn't really speak like Shakespeare's characters any more than we do, and people in movies today often don't really sound like

people in real life. As you read, think about why he might have decided to write his characters speaking that way.