

How to use writing to make sense of a difficult passage:

1. Write out or copy and paste the passage:

The notion of a sheep's paradise like that revolts, they say, our higher imagination. Where then would be the steeps of life? (James 8)

2. By referring to the surrounding text in the source essay, figure out the vague references: What is "*that*"? Who are "*they*"?

Here is the sentence that precedes our passage: "The militarily-patriotic and the romantic-minded everywhere, and especially the professional military class, refuse to admit for a moment that war may be a transitory phenomenon in social evolution." Based on this passage, we conclude the following:

The notion of a sheep's paradise like **that** [a paradise in which social evolution has resulted in the end of war] revolts, **they** [the militarily-patriotic and the romantic-minded] say, our higher imagination.

3. Figure out the meaning of unclear words or phrases, using common sense, a dictionary or a research tool like Google, or your teacher (still your best research tool):
  - a. **Sheep's paradise:** A paradise for peaceful, passive, stupid people.
  - b. **Steeps of life:** the high points that we reach by great effort, like climbing Everest.
4. Figure out *who/what* is doing *what* to *who/what*. (Note that a sentence doesn't always have to say to who or what the thing is being done.)

[WHAT] **The notion** of a sheep's paradise [for peaceful, passive, stupid people] like that [a paradise in which social evolution has resulted in the end of war] [IS DOING WHAT] **revolts**, they [the militarily-patriotic and the romantic-minded] say, [TO WHAT] **our higher imagination**. [WHO? **the militarily-patriotic and the romantic-minded** (implied) IS DOING WHAT? **say** (implied)] Where then would be the steeps of life [the high points that we reach by great effort, like climbing Everest]?

5. Finally, rewrite the sentence so the ambiguities are cleared up, and so its content is clear. This rewrite is a paraphrase, which you have to cite just like a quotation, by giving the author and page number. Only the parts that are exactly as James wrote them are put in quotation marks. At this point you would have some text that would be appropriate to use in an essay:

James argues that the military and romantic-minded people would say that the notion of no war "revolts...our higher imagination" because that "paradise" would only appeal to people who are as passive and stupid as sheep. Those military and romantic-minded people would ask in dismay, "Where then would be the steeps of life" (James 8-9)?

