Paret was a Cuban, a proud club fighter who had become welterweight champion because of his unusual ability to take a punch. His style of fighting was to take three punches to the head in order to give back two. At the end of ten rounds, he would still be bouncing, his opponent would have a headache. But in the last two years, over the fifteen-round fights, he had started to take some bad maulings.

This fight had its turns. Griffith won most of the early rounds, but Paret knocked Griffith down in the sixth. Griffith had trouble getting up, but made it, came alive and was dominating Paret again before the round was over. Then Paret began to wilt. In the middle of the eighth round, after a clubbing punch had turned his back to Griffith, Paret walked three disgusted steps away, showing his hindquarters. For a champion, he took much too long to turn back around. It was the first hint of weakness Paret had ever shown, and it must have inspired a particular shame, because he fought the rest of the fight as if he were seeking to demonstrate that he could take more punishment than any man alive. In the twelfth, Griffith caught him. Paret got trapped in a corner. Trying to duck away, his left arm and his head became tangled on the wrong side of the top rope. Griffith was in like a cat ready to rip the life out of a huge boxed rat. He hit him eighteen right hands in a row, an act which took perhaps three or four seconds, Griffith making a pent-up whimpering sound all the while he attacked, the right hand whipping like a piston rod which has broken through the crankcase, or like a baseball bat demolishing a pumpkin.

I was sitting in the second row of that corner—they were not ten feet away from me, and like everybody else, I was hypnotized. I had never seen one man hit another so hard and so many times. Over the referee’s face came a look of woe as if some spasm had passed its way through him, and then he leaped on Griffith to pull him away. It was the act of a brave man. Griffith was uncontrollable. His trainer leaped into the ring, his manager, his cut man, there were four people holding Griffith, but he was off on an orgy, he had left the Garden, he was back on a hoodlum’s street. If he had been able to break loose from his handlers and the referee, he would have jumped Paret to the floor and whaled on him there.

And Paret? Paret died on his feet. As he took those eighteen punches something happened to everyone who was in psychic range of the event. Some part of his death reached out to us. One felt it hover in the air. He was still standing in the ropes, trapped as he had been before, he gave some little half-smile of regret, as if he were saying, “I didn’t know I was going to die just yet,” and then, his head leaning back but still erect, his death came to breathe about him. He began to pass away. As he passed, so his limbs descended beneath him, and he sank slowly to the floor. He went down more slowly than any fighter had ever gone down, he went down like a large ship which turns on end and slides second by second into its grave. As he went down, the sound of Griffith’s punches echoed in the mind like a heavy ax in the distance chopping into a wet log.
Stretching your Cms! (using examples from “The Death of Benny Paret” by Norman Mailer)

1. **A stick is never just a stick:**

Don’t focus on the literal object in your evidence (CD) but on the concept or emotion it may represent.

CD: “I was sitting in the second row of that corner—they were not ten feet away from me, and like everybody else, I was hypnotized.”

CMs: (Connecting the hypnotic nature of the fight with horror)

The close proximity of the speaker to the boxing ring makes his descriptions come face to face with the reader, creating an intimate eyewitness account that the reader cannot turn away from, as if hypnotized by an uncontrollable and undeniable force. Being under the spell of the boxing match—the smells, the sounds, the sights—simultaneously horrify and mesmerize the readers as the brutal violence of the fight plays out.

2. **Theme it up!**

You may also identify one or more overarching or “universal” themes to potentially add greater focus and purpose to your essay. You can “theme it up” whether or not “theme” is actually mentioned in the prompt.

CD: “…it was the first hint of weakness Paret had ever shown, and it must have inspired a particular shame, because he fought the rest of the fight as if he were seeking to demonstrate that he could take more punishment than any man alive.”

CMs: (Creating an insightful theme about man’s violent side)

The unexpected death of Benny Paret calls into question our definition of “sport.” Paret’s reputation for taking more punishing blows as a strategy is one reason spectators respected him and paid money to see him box. Our tastes for violent sports in a civilized world suggest we are really not so far from savagery, from an instinctual desire to hurt—that so-called “killer instinct” prevalent in the animal kingdom at large. Furthermore, the sport of boxing reveals that we are perhaps powerless to change. At no point during the lethal and legal beating of Paret did anyone intervene, and cry, “Hold! Enough!”
3. **Analyze your analysis. Keep asking yourself the question, “So what?!”**

*Question, even contradict your own statements, report and give an explanation for tensions or complications in your own logic and interpretations.*

*CD:* “He went down more slowly than any fighter had ever gone down...like a large ship which turns on end and slides second by second into its grave.”

*CMs: (Offering possible ways to interpret the quote)*

The description of Paret’s slow collapse to the floor paints a picture of a mighty fall, even a fall from grace. Paret’s death is likened to a large sinking ship—the Titanic comes to mind—as he passes away. Paret was indeed a juggernaut, an invincible Titan whose ability to take a punch led him to a welterweight championship. Just as the Titanic was considered “unsinkable,” so was Paret. Upon further reflection, perhaps Mailer’s diction was meant to highlight the shock felt by the spectators; describing the sinking of Paret’s head and then limbs beneath him in a kind of slow motion drags out the awful, unexpected death...a death that “reached out to us.”

4. **Word Isolation:**

*Rather than always speaking of the author’s diction as a whole, hyper-focus on a word and milk it for all it’s worth in the way of connotations and associated meanings.*

*CD:* “But in the last two years, over the fifteen-round fights, he had started to take some bad maulings.”

*CMs: (Hyperfocusing on the connotations of one word)*

Mailer’s initial praise of Paret’s unusual boxing style in the first paragraph ends in a startling word: “maulings.” Immediately, this word conjures up a primitive, animalistic landscape rife with wild animals like lions or tigers. Paret is not evading a left hook or right punch, he is struggling for his life against a beast with ferocious fangs and ripping claws that seeks to shred him. Furthermore, “maulings” evokes a sense of helplessness and vulnerability. Being “mauled” is to be overpowered with no sense of escape, a frightening, violent and perhaps deadly attack.
5. Critical Approaches to a text (filters):

Examining texts through a specific “filter” or “lens” to interpret it from that specific point of view; e.g. Naturalism (God and Nature are indifferent or hostile toward mankind; people are animals in struggle for survival); Romanticism (man is godlike and can draw inspiration and power from Nature); Post-Modernism (no right or wrong; the quest is making sense out of the senselessness of modern life); Social Criticism (what and how is the author criticizing society’s values and traditions); Psychological (what does the text reveal about the human mind and behavior), Feminism (how does the text treat women’s concerns, history, and issues).

CD: “...as he took those eighteen punches something happened to everyone who was in psychic range of the event. Some part of his death reached out to us.”

CMs: (Psychological Filter): From a psychological standpoint, Mailer’s inclusive observation forces not only the onlookers, but we, the readers, to share in Paret’s death. This connection reminds us of our own mortality; and how when one human dies, we all die a tiny bit ourselves. This vicarious death seems to be predicated on the principle of empathy—that we, as fellow humans, cannot watch another’s pain and death and walk away indifferently, untouched by the experience. This empathy and camaraderie resulting from sharing in Paret’s death may, in the end, be our only safeguard against violence and savagery overcoming the human race completely.