

Style and associated questions

1. Virginia Woolf is considered a Modernist writer; research the term and explain in what ways modernist novels are different to what preceded them. Make a list of differences and try to identify some examples of these in *Mrs Dalloway*. Don't just write down the definition from a website or textbook: put the definition in your own words so that it makes sense to you when you look back at it.
2. Who do you think the narrator is in the novel? Do you think one character's voice is 'heard' more often than others? Does an omniscient narrator ever 'speak' to the reader? What effect does the shifting viewpoint have on our understanding of events in the novel?
3. Is the novel about any 'great' events? What are they? If you don't think the novel has any 'great' events do you think it matters?
4. Do you think the opening and closing lines of the novel are effective? Explain the reasons behind your opinion.
5. Does it matter that the book finishes, as it begins, with nothing changing in terms of the surviving characters' thoughts and behavior?
6. Do you think it is important that both Peter Walsh and Sally Seton come to visit Clarissa after so many years apart? Why do you think Virginia Woolf included these characters?
7. When the novel was first published some critics questioned the presence of Septimus Warren Smith. What do you think of his character and how important do you think he is to the novel? According to Maureen Howard, in the 1981 Foreword to the Harcourt edition of the novel, '... the character of Septimus Warren Smith ... is ([Virginia Woolf] instructs us so openly in her introduction to the 1928 edition) intended to be the double of Mrs. Dalloway' (p.xi). What do you think of this idea? What parallels can you draw between the two? What links are there between their lives; thoughts; memories and fears?
8. Many of the characters' paths cross, literally, in the novel - for example, when Clarissa is in the florists and sees the car passing – with one character's narrative picking up as another's disappears. What do you think of this device and the way it interweaves characters' lives?