

Reading Response Assignments

A Response is a short piece of writing (approximately 300-500 words) that provides a generative reaction to the course readings and materials. There are several reasons we will respond to our readings in this fashion. First, you will maximize the readings' potentials if you respond to them in writing. Second, the writing responses provide a basis for class discussion—even if you only get a portion of the reading, others will connect to different parts. Third, writing your notes, responses, summaries, and reactions to the readings will help you generate a storehouse of ideas to draw from when working on your projects.

While I offer a few suggested forms for response below, I welcome and encourage you to compose your own style of response and ask your own questions provided that the response reflects a sincere and thoughtful engagement with the readings. I tend to privilege summary, so consider that the default, but what I'm really looking for is some genuine engagement. Responses will be graded on the basis of participation—if you do them, on time, and completely, you will gain full credit. But I will give – and + to track what I consider thoughtful or genuine engagement.

Response Types

Summary – Summaries should clearly and concisely encapsulate the most important points from the assigned reading. A good way to do this is to: identify the “target of the reading” (what does the essay say it's working against?); describe what the essay does in response to that target; identify its main claim; and/or isolate important concepts in the reading for the author or for your project, including distinctive terms and words. (If there is a term you don't know that seems important and can't get out of context, spend a minute of two Google to see if you can sort out a provisional definition.)

Quote – Select a substantial and interesting quote from the reading. Begin your response with the quote and build from it. In what ways does that quote serve a good representation of a major theme/topic in the reading? In what ways might it relate to something else? Where can it go?

Resource – For this response, locate a “resource” outside of our required reading that poses a relevant connection to one or more of the texts. These sources may include news stories, images, video clips, audio files, and/or posts by bloggers. Quickly summarize the source and show how it connects to the main reading for you—how it exemplifies or expands the concepts or arguments. Include a link to the page, image, or video as a Works Cited.

Statement – In this type of response, begin one opening sentence/paragraph with the phrase “I notice” and proceed to write what you notice about the reading—what concepts or ideas does it evoke? Why is this a unique text? In what ways is it similar or dissimilar to other texts like it? Begin a second sentence/paragraph with the phrase “I wonder” and follow that with the questions or ideas prompted by the reading. Each is meant to be productive or generative and is not meant to illicit “correct” readings.

Question – Like the Statement, this response asks you to converse with the text. Please use this response to pose generative questions to the reading. These questions should not be overly simplistic (Why did this writer use so many words?) but should, instead, seek to ask sincere questions of understanding: questions of critique (what doesn't seem quite right about the argument); or questions of possibility (what if . . .). Then try to generate an answer to the question you have about or based on the text. Use the text itself, texts we've already read, and even a Google search to generate a possible or plausible answer.