

WRITING A RESPONSE PAPER

Writing a “response paper” might seem to imply that you will be writing about your emotional responses and reactions to a particular text, that you will be answering the question: “How did you feel about the text?” This is **NOT** what you are to do in a critical response paper. In this sort of paper, “How did you feel” is a legitimate starting point perhaps, but what is more interesting is why you felt that way.

This course asks you to be an active reader—to consider the act of reading as a full contact sport—and to **create meaning from the text** rather than simply absorbing the material. In this vein, a reading response paper should engage the text in some fashion. The paper should examine and begin to formulate the questions that a more formal analytical argument essay might argue.

Ultimately, your college career will most likely ask you to devise your own paper topics—rather than responding to the questions a professor might pose about a text (literary or otherwise), you will be asked to make an academic argument—without the guidance of “leading” questions. The purpose, then, of this response paper is to help you begin to see the kinds of issues that most interest you in the texts you read. From there, you can begin to take control of your academic voice.

Writing a response paper means that you may choose to write about your own reaction to the essay as a whole or you may choose to write about a particular point or points made by the author. **Whatever you choose to focus on, the response must be critical, not simply a description of your own personal feelings about the essay.** The response paper consists of your close examination of the text and the questions in the text that most intrigue you. It does not need to be a fully structured and argued essay—it should, however, pull together your thoughts about a particular issue in the text.

Some Suggested Approaches:

1. Choose a concept or theme in the text and mark all of the occurrences in the text.
 - Is there a pattern to the instances you marked?
 - What does this concept seem to do for the text as a whole?
 - What else does the concept/theme mean in the “wider” world?
2. What questions do you have about the text? What was confusing?
 - Where do these questions occur?
 - Can you come up with any answers from the context?
 - Is your question related to any other themes of the text? Can these help answer the question?

Use these questions to help you **formulate a claim**—a specific and arguable response to the aspect of the text that you are responding to. **DO NOT simply summarize the text.** You will briefly summarize the article to familiarize your reader with the ideas you are discussing, but **the focus of a response paper is your argument.** Be sure to organize your thoughts in a logical manner and to **include quoted evidence** from the text to support the claim you make.