

CULT320- Guidelines for Response Papers

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The Task:

Students are responsible for writing 8 2-page critical reading responses. Responses should focus on working through the assigned texts; you will want to explain the author's main argument, connect the text to others we have read/classroom discussions/current events (when possible), and end with questions you have for the author/or potential questions for class discussion (that you should be ready and willing to bring up in class).

These are each worth 25 points. You may turn these in whenever you wish so long as you turn in at least 4 your responses by the Midterm Exam and turn responses in at the beginning of class on the days you've chosen. You may not turn in late responses or email your responses. Papers should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, and be stapled or printed double-sided.

Sometimes it's just easier to tell you what NOT to do:

- Do not merely summarize the text
- Do not tell me personal anecdotes about how you relate or don't relate to the text. Or if you feel such openings are crucial to your paper, be sure that they are kept to a minimum and that you ground this relationship to critical engagement with the ideas/texts and maintains a scholarly academic tone.
- Do not tell me the text is "interesting", "good", "bad" or "confusing." Use appropriate language to get at such statements while also basing your claims on specifics of the text. For instance, point to a specific passage and attempt to grapple with why it is difficult or why you disagree with the author. Base your criticisms and rationalizations in scholarship, not on whim or unsubstantiated belief.
- Keep in mind this is a very short writing exercise. Long passages of quoted material and/or numerous short quotes are unnecessary and quotes from the reading should only be used if they are essential to your response and *cannot* be summarized in your own words.

Grading Guidelines:

Here are some questions I ask myself as I grade your work:

- Does the student understand the author's argument?
- Does the student point to specific key passages to ground his/her analysis of the text?
- Is the student able to relate this text to: the material world around us, previous classroom texts and discussions, and his/her understanding of history?
- Does the student critically engage with the text?
- Does the student have questions and/or criticisms of the text?

Make sure you get full credit by doing the following:

- Bring your paper in hardcopy to class. Emailed papers are instant zeros.
- Don't write a response paper if you don't plan on coming to class the day those readings are due.
- Turn in 4 papers before the midterm exam. You will receive a zero on any missing responses.
- Follow grammatical, formatting, and page length requirements (don't write too little or too much!).
- If you bring in outside material, make sure to properly cite it, including a bibliographical citation.

Papers will be graded on a scale of 1-5 as follows:

5 Points

- Will demonstrate a superlative understanding of the ideas presented in the text and an elevated level of thinking that goes beyond a junior-level college course
- Will demonstrate proper writing in grammar, tone, style, organization and content.
- Will address all of the readings assigned for the day in some capacity by placing these readings in dialogue with one another.

3-4 Points

- Will demonstrate a good understanding of the material and present an adequate level of thinking and writing that meets the requirements for a junior-level college course.
- Will meet the writing and formatting requirements.

1-2 Points

- Will demonstrate a fairly weak understanding of the material.
- Does not properly engage with text or classroom ideas/material.
- Or, if it does demonstrate a superlative or good understanding of the material, student has missed one or more of the paper/formatting requirements.

0 Points

- You've clearly done something wrong and should come talk to me.

Overall, your reading responses should indicate progress in your thinking about and application of the theories and topics we discuss. An upswing in the scores of your reading responses over the course of the semester will be reflected positively in your overall final response paper grade. (This means, don't get discouraged by a couple 2 or 3s at the beginning of the semester, they can be subsumed by higher scores as the semester progresses.)