

How to Prepare and to Write a Response

What a response paper is:

1) A well-written, mistake-free, critical, 400-500 word essay that responds to a reading or other text (film, painting, photograph) that demonstrates an interpretation of the work in question.

AND

2) A short paper that demonstrates a familiarity with the interpretations of our main texts

AND

3) A short paper that places the subjects in question within larger contexts and explores a particular theme that the writer finds interesting or explanatory.

AND

4) In this paper, the hows and whys are much more important than the whats, whos, and whens (but these need to be included for context).

AND

5) A short paper that uses specific examples drawn from shared resources.

What it is NOT:

It is not a summary of a text

It is not a commentary on how you “felt” about the work in question; your opinion about the quality of the book or film is all but irrelevant.

What to ask yourself as you prepare:

PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

What is the argument/theme of the work?

How is that argument made or theme developed?

What evidence does the author provide?

Do you find that evidence convincing? Why? Why not?

How does the argument or theme of the work compare to other arguments on the same topic?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

How does this work reflect the time and place in which it was produced?

What was the context of when it was produced? What might this have to do with the argument of the work?

What are the critical elements of the argument or key premises/assumptions?

Typical format:

Hook/Introduction:

1. In one paragraph, draw the reader in and explain the point/s that you wish to make in your response. Do not leave this first paragraph without explaining your main point.
2. A short paragraph on the larger issue the scholar is considering.
3. Two to three paragraphs provide your response to the work – how and why you found it engaging, convincing, helpful, etc. . . but as a scholar. Do NOT comment as a “reader” and certainly NOT as a student. Always keep your points in the forefront of this section. Do NOT slip into too much summary. Use examples to demonstrate your points. Do NOT editorialize. Do NOT assume that your reader knows the subject.
4. Conclude by universalizing your points.

Your response should be free of grammatical, organizational, and spelling errors.