

BIOET 401Q: “Science, Ethics, Policy, and Law”

Fall 2023

A Guide to Response Papers

The BIOET 401Q [syllabus](#) indicates that students are required to write “(S)hort response / critique papers: three, worth 150 points each.” Because the course has a total of 1000 possible points, each response paper is worth 15 percent of your final grade. This document is designed to provide guidance on that aspect of the course.

What’s a “response paper”?

It’s a short essay that responds to one (or possibly more) of the readings assigned in the class. The goal of a response paper is to demonstrate understanding of the reading(s) in question, and to show how the point(s) of those readings relate to other (possibly broader) topics or questions around science, ethics, policy, and law (SEPL).

As this minimal description suggests, the specific structure and content of a response paper is largely up to you. A non-exhaustive list of possible forms includes:

- an exposition and critique of the author’s argument(s), drawing on one or more of (a) other course readings, (b) in-class discussions and examples, (c) other related readings not assigned in class, (d) recent developments in SEPL, and/or (e) contemporary events;
- a miniature “policy brief” (along the lines of the final project), drawing on the readings’ points to argue for or against a particular policy in a relevant area of science;
- a discussion of how the reading relates to a historical or contemporary SEPL-related event;
- a personal response, drawing on an experience in your own life, ideally illustrating some connection (either validating or critical) between the reading’s point(s) and the experience in question;

Other possible formats are, of course, also possible. If you have questions about a possible direction for your paper, please contact the instructor.

How long is a response paper?

A response paper may be no more than 1500 words (that’s about six double-spaced pages). It may be shorter; there is no lower word limit.

What about formatting and other details?

In addition to the things discussed above, response papers should meet the following criteria:

1. They should be typed, and double-spaced, in 12 point font (ideally, something readable that is not Comic Sans).
2. The paper's first page should contain a header section in the upper left that includes:
 - your name,
 - the name of the class ("BIOET 401Q" will do),
 - the date the paper was submitted,
 - the phrase "Response paper #X," where "X" is one of {one, two, three}, and
 - the citation of the article to which the paper is responding.
3. The paper should be submitted as an **Adobe PDF** file, and sent to me via e-mail at zorn@psu.edu.

What if I have other questions about my response paper(s)?

If you have additional questions, you should send an e-mail to Professor Zorn, at zorn@psu.edu.