

## What is a Reaction Paper

**Purpose:** Reaction papers are intended to demonstrate your comprehension of the assigned readings. They will help you keep track of important ideas that you will need to review again in preparation for the final exam. Most importantly, they are intended to help you examine and analyze the assigned readings more closely, thereby gaining a better appreciation of the topic.

**Format:** Papers must be double-spaced, 500–700 words (no more than 750 words). They must have a title, your name, page numbering, and consistent use of footnotes/references. Proofreading for grammatical errors is expected and plays a role in the evaluation and grading. Make sure that your paper is in the form of an essay, with an introduction, body, and conclusion.

**Content:** Your reaction paper should demonstrate comprehension of the assigned readings, and contain a critical and thoughtful reaction to the chosen reading. Critical analysis should make up the majority of the reaction paper. There are a number of ways you might approach the task of reacting to the readings.

- Focus on an aspect of the reading that you will argue pertains to some issue or idea we have discussed in class. Does the reading support, undermine, or come into tension with previous issues or concepts? Explain why it is significant.
- Focus on a particular theme or issue raised by the reading, and give your own perspective on it. Be sure to elaborate on your opinion. On what do you base your opinions? What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the reading, as you see it? Do you have any personal experience that is relevant to the reading?

**What to Avoid:** A Reaction Paper is *not* a book report! You must give some brief summary of the reading in order to write a good paper, but only summarize what is necessary to write your reaction. Also, do *not* repeat class lecture or discussion content. This paper should be *your* original thought.

It is also important to avoid vague impressions about the reading. Base everything you say on something specific in the reading, such as a quote, a concept, or an argument. Be specific, and make sure you make proper reference to these specific details.

**Nota Bene:** You are strongly advised to make use of the resources our university provides. This includes the writing lab. Bring a finished draft of your paper to the writing lab at least one week before the due-date, and anticipate re-writing. Be sure to refer to a writing guide, such as Strung & White's *The Elements of Style* and the *MLA Handbook*.