ENGLISH 1301: Essentials of College Rhetoric
Texas Tech University
Unit II: Reading the Conversations

Project 2: Summary & Synthesis Essay with Writer's Memo

Prompt & Scenario
Imagine that an editor has decided to create an anthology of texts for first-year writing classes and wants a section of the anthology to include texts from our course's Unit II. You have been tasked with writing the introductory explanation for a set of readings for this group of texts. The editor asks that you include 1) an opening paragraph synthesizing the conversation around the texts and then 2) summaries of two texts from the unit that you've chosen to include. These summaries should both explain the context of the texts and explain the authors' arguments.

Further Explanation of Audience
You have three audiences to keep in mind as you compose this project: First, college students (your primary audience), who will need some context for the two texts you summarize and will want to understand the authors' arguments. Second, college writing teachers (your secondary audience), who when they read your introductory material will want to understand the original context of the texts and believe that these are rhetorically interesting and sophisticated readings. Third, the editor of the anthology (your gatekeeper audience), who will want to see a polished and sophisticated discussion that is also accessible to first-year writers.

Options for Texts to Summarize
Over the next few weeks, we will be reading four texts that are in explicit or implicit conversation with each other. You will need to select **two** of these texts to include in your essay.

Writer's Memo
To accompany this essay, you will write a memo to your instructor explaining at least three choices you made in writing your summaries. In this memo, you should identify three specific choices you made as you wrote this essay and explain why you made those decisions. As you write the essay, you will make many decisions regarding paraphrasing, inclusion of ideas or concepts from the original, organization of content, style and phrasing, inclusion of quotations, and more. Select three of these and *thoroughly* explain why you made these choices and why they're effective choices. This memo should be at least 300 words and provide a well-developed paragraph for each of these three choices.

Expectations & Guidelines
In order to earn a C, your project should conform to these guidelines:

- Be written in a readable, double-spaced 11–12 pt. font
- Include an opening paragraph that explains to readers the general contours of the conversation (provides a synthesis of the various viewpoints and explains what is at stake)
- Include two effective summaries of texts from this unit that
    - Are 1-2 paragraphs in length each
    - Represent the original texts accurately and fairly
    - Use your own words to express ideas (not patchwriting)
    - Use quotations sparingly, if at all, to present the author's key ideas
    - Express ideas coherently, accurately, and comprehensively
    - Provide useful context for readers who have not encountered the text
    - Include in-text citations

- Have a title that is helpful to readers
- Include a works cited list in MLA format
- Use clear language and be carefully edited
- Include a writer's memo of at least 300 words that explains three choices you made in writing the summaries

In order to earn an A or B, your essay should conform to the following degrees of excellence:

- The summaries convey a sophisticated understanding of the original source.
- The summaries anticipate and select the ideas and details your audience will need to understand the texts' arguments.
- The summaries omit ideas and details that are ancillary to the needs of your audience.
- The summaries are organized effectively.
- The summaries use attributive tags effectively.
- The introductory paragraph synthesizes the conversation effectively and shows a sophisticated understanding of what is at stake and where and how rhetors have different perspectives in the conversation. It also sets up the two summaries to help make a coherent essay that introduces the two readings.
- The writer's memo includes a sophisticated discussion of your three choices, explaining with clarity and detail both why you made these decisions and why they make the summaries effective.

What Makes a Strong Summary?

Summaries are incredibly difficult to write effectively. Here are is a list of qualities of an effective summary:

- Provides **context** for a reader to help the reader situate the source (this often involves providing the title, audience and purpose of the source, publication information, and information about the author, depending on the context of your summary)
- **Accurately, fairly, and clearly** conveys the author's main point, thesis, or claim, usually using an active transitive verb (e.g., contends, argues, complains, pleads, asserts, challenges…)
- **Comprehensively yet selectively** explains the author's reasoning, or how they make the argument (sometimes, this includes discussing their methods). Your goal is to explain the argument while selecting details to help a reader unfamiliar with the text understand the argument, but you can't include everything: You'll want to make decisions about importance and relevance.
- **Ethically** and accurately paraphrases in your own words (that is, avoids patchwriting and plagiarism)
- Is **organized** in a **coherent** manner that helps a reader make sense of the original argument (Usually, in academic writing, this means placing the main point and context early.)
- Selectively **quotes** the original text. These quotes are limited and are integrated into your prose, with transitions into and out of quotations. (Strong academic writing typically quotes very selectively, and in many summaries, the entire summary avoids quotation.)
- Uses **attributive tags** to clearly mark an author's perspective and claims as theirs
- Is (typically) **charitable**
- Relatively free of surface errors (mechanics)
- Stylistically interesting to read
- Accurately attributes quotes and paraphrases using **citations** and references
- Is **developed rhetorically** to assist in the rhetorical goal of the larger text in which it is situated